

J. Vegey

XXL

EPHEMERIDES

FOLLOWED BY:  
*TEN DAYS' WONDER*  
*SHANBULÜKE*



## ***FOR WHOM I DISAPPOINTED OR WILL DISAPPOINT ...***

### **FOREWORD**

This is a one-person version of a book. Of course, I wrote it all by myself – even though this English version benefitted from Google translate much appreciated support. But also, since this translation would not exist, if not for the one with whom I committed to work it out.

So, this is a Rabbit book. I hope she will read it through with not too much aversion or disappointment. Honesty is not always leading to the best loving output – but I have to take this risk. A promise is a promise !

I imagined this book as a kind of memorial, through which to leave a trace of the way in which each of the past seventy years has been lived. A vintage, a white pebble or a black stone. With, along these steps, an invisible ramp accompanying the baby of the Marshall Plan, towards the slender old man, ostracized by coronavirus.

XXL is my clothing size. It is also the reverse of LXX, seventy in Roman numerals. This necessarily discontinuous numbering - who has ever written "*VII point V*" for 7 ½? - allowed me to make narration more fluid, while instilling a mysterious character through the exoticism of MCM and other LIX.

The immanent logic consolidating discrete sequences into a life stream stems from two coils.

There is the coil which takes us from one year to the next through the continuity of a discontinuous time. Event, decision, choice, there is nothing trivial in everyday life: tomorrow would not be what it was going to be, if in my today the wind had turned. Each day, however, is not the exclusive product of the day before, and the options remain within the realm of possibilities. Lucien Sève<sup>1</sup> has left us, but his thoughts remain.

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<sup>1</sup> Lucien Sève (1926-2020) was a great French philosopher. It is an understatement to say that his work *Marxism and Theory of Personality* (1969) enlightened and inspired me. As one can read in Wikipedia, "*All of his work is a questioning of the human essence and the place of the person in a dialectical and historical materialist conception*".

Then, also on the loom, as the backbone of our individual embroidery, there is the great thread of the world, the one that never breaks, twisted in an infinity of fibres of history, the history of time, that of the place, the history of the people.

Held in younger, more wrinkled or more distant hands, the spinning wheel would not have spun the same ball. I know it, and everyone agrees. However, the strap stretching my thread remains largely unknown to the youngest.

Whether it is distant influences, such as the Algerian war, or more recent, such as Catalonia's march towards independence, no one will spontaneously associate an event among myriads, even of undisputable historical outreach, with the flutter of the wing of the me-butterfly who, in the sixties or in the twenty-first century, took a left rather than continuing straight, left there rather than at the next station.

Life as a gigantic sugar-spinning machine - the wand that is held out does not know which and how many grains or colours will be turning at the trunk of the cone, it crooks at random. However, the sagacious child, given the shimmering of cotton candy, its size, its texture, will be able to tell which dyes, how quickly, will have joined the cane or the beet.

So I chose, with the privilege of a retroflex look, the scansions of history which, it seems to me, have contributed the most, year after year, to shaping my field of possibilities.

Of course, I don't claim to have performed scientific work in this part either. However, for each bookmark, I had to respect proven data. So even though I sometimes fold the narrative into a shape that suits me, this curvature takes place within respect for the facts.

Mistrustful of the verbiage which tires the reader, I wanted to impose another constraint on myself. The book should have 140 chapters - 70 about Life, 70 about World - each would fit on one page. Rigor has come up against memory requirements. So I allowed myself a tolerance of simple to double.

Is this not reasonable, for who remakes the world and tells the truth of lives?

*Beijing - Plougasnou, May 2019 - May 2020*

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MCML  
JUSTICE MISCARRIAGE

I was born in 1950, March 9, in Paris. Apart from this, the year certainly counted many other more important events.

Curiously however, the Internet, my great provider for historical references, did not reveal anything catching my eyes as deserving to illustrate this first year - I mean no such event which I can now characterize as having resonated with the cord of my journey .

A possible exception that, in the light of history, seems more grain of sand than touchstone. It was precisely on March 9, 1950 that Timothy Evans, a young man of 25, was hanged in the United Kingdom for the murder of his baby just six months earlier.

Three years later, his neighbour's confession made him innocent - but Mass had been said for Timothy. Justice was quickly over, and it had gone astray.

It was while preparing these chapters that I realized I was born the same day as the assumption of a tragic miscarriage of justice.

Timothy Evans' fate will therefore not have influenced my conscience in any way. But its coincidence allows me to slip a few words on the right to error and to redemption. Being the Bethune Executioner<sup>2</sup>, I would have pardoned Milady with the same candour that makes me recover, in the siphon where she drowns, the spider which, perhaps tomorrow, will blister my cheek.

Timothy Evans was said to be a bit lost in the suburbs of London, he who came from Wales. His wife, who was murdered at the same time as their granddaughter, could hardly pull them up either.

When the couple realized that a second child was looming, they had the wisdom to turn away - and the misfortune to rely on a neighbour more psychopathic than angel maker. They all perished - the mother, the foetus and the child by the knitter and then the father

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<sup>2</sup> In the Three Musketeers, Milady de Winter, who made d'Artagnan her lover and then killed his fiancée out of jealousy, was sentenced to death and executed by the Bethune Executioner

by the cord, before the next tenant discovered behind his partitions the trophies of previous crimes that Timothy had not been able to commit.

Timothy Evans' martyrdom is said to have contributed to the abolition of the death penalty in Britain.

So much the better - too bad was too late.

It would have been better for Timothy Evans if social misery had been abolished first. So perhaps his short life would not have known the gangue of presumption from which he could not get out.

Poverty could have been abolished - times were suitable. But that didn't happen, and Timothy died when I was born.

# I

## THE MARSHALL PLAN

Year 1, year 0? According to Chinese tradition, the first candle is blown out with the first cry. We have a year in our first year and that is nothing absurd to it. The Romans, in any case, did not practice zero. Their figures therefore impose the date of this chapter.

I have no memory, of course, of my first months; the plural starting at two, I could even have admitted not having memory of my first years. Talking about it is like relying on external sources - in this case agency reports. To be born to a father whose personality is consubstantial to anti-communism in the midst of building the American wall against the red wave exposes you to notoriety.

It was only late, when I found an agency shot where I appeared in the arms of my mother under the tender eyes of an already greying father that I became aware of both infant precariousness and the power of propaganda when reading the legend "*Monsieur et Madame are relieved - penicillin from America saved their son*".

My father never mentioned the reasons that pushed him out of the Stalinist ways - he necessarily walked there, to meet his in-laws - but the truth is that until the end he carried high the symbols of the Marshall Plan, embellished, he said, with CNT-FAI<sup>3</sup> anarcho-sindicalism. He would not witness me denying this part of his heritage, perhaps I would have turned different if he had survived my seventeenth year.

Traitor to this branch, my initiation to the Party was like a return to the fold for the other. Workers from Luxembourg, from Lorraine and then from the Paris Faubourgs - this is how the Eastern districts of Paris were called - the maternal side of my ancestry could not have been more red. When I was very young, on Thursdays sometimes at my grandparents' I read *La Voix Ouvrière* – Workers' Voice, an organ of the CGT.

Sometimes my remarks reflected what my father called indoctrination. He then rocked his sentences while hustling me - but I always preferred these Parisian pages, Bolshevik, warm, local, to the vaguely Huguenot austere certainties from the Languedoc cradle.

As for penicillin - the captioned shot was true. I knew this when I read, a little bit later, one of these sheets covered with my father's handwritten fly paws. I almost didn't survive March 1950 - he was more than anxious waiting after the miracles of immediate post-war therapy.

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<sup>3</sup> CNT-FAI: National Labour Confederation – Iberic anarchist federation, a Spanish anarchist trade union and political movement from times of civil war

At the end of these lines, my father described how he had become aware, at the risk of losing him, of the importance for him of this first child, and of the reality of a paternal love he finally lived.

I just read this love - it was not told to me. Neither did I express it to him. We were two silent buddies, and he left us too early to talk about it.

MCMLI

## BEAUJOLAIS NOUVEAU HAS ARRIVED

It is said that the culture of wine is as intimately linked to the development of young French people, as music is to that of young Chinese. Everyone here knows the Beaujolais Nouveau, the Austerlitz sun of the winemakers. Here's how it all started...

In 1951, certain winegrowers wished to free themselves without waiting from the brand-new rule fixing at December the earliest date for putting on the market the cuvées of the year. The know-how that required some three months for the fermentation of the grapes to transform the juice into wine worthy of the name should not be imposed upon them.

Thus, barely established in September the deadline was abolished by a November circular - just in time for people to drink between Macon and l'Arbresle the autumn bottles with raspberry nose, banana flavour of black gamay with white juice.

This is how things work in the beautiful Land of Law - 法国, the Chinese name for France: it is enough for a standard to be enacted for exceptions to flourish, offspring just as legitimate as their parents, whose parricide they sometimes prepare.

The general social security system gives rise to special systems, the existence of which justifies, a few decades later, the dismantling of the first. The ordinances of 1944 protect the press from double-dippers and sharks, the ebb of 1945 introduces the exceptions which finally will concentrate among some, always the same ones, the exercise of the freedom to inform.

As for the so-called universal suffrage, it is now accompanied by such shortcomings that it becomes censorial, whether on the part of those who delegate or that of the delegates, agents freed from any obligation with regard to their constituents.

The advent of Beaujolais Nouveau is nothing more than a success for lobbyists.

It therefore deserved a special mention in the ginning of years which too rarely will light up with a sticker in the colours of the common good.

Grape pressure groups showed their nose years ahead of the European Community. Did they then sense their omnipotence to come, when the slightest inclination by the people is now being buried under the dumpsters of regular and successive electoral disillusion?

Beaujolais Nouveau is very much like this so-called falsely representative democracy: immature, a little bitter, and finally, a substitute.

## II THE DRAWER OF THE DRESSER

Half believing in the better tomorrows was not the shortest path to make it to the top when I was two. Was it a reminder of the class traditions that located our first home on rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud, named after this CGT hero, shot in 1941 by the occupying invader?

I have a vague memory of a small apartment, a little darkened with waxed wooden furniture - including a famous dresser with drawers, famous because of the maternal legend which made its top drawer my permanent cradle.

It's possible. The times were not simple. The start year, that of great changes, would only come at the same time as Father Peter<sup>4</sup>, or in spite of him. While others, so numerous, shivered with cold and hunger, we changed neighbourhoods and acquired a standing.

The rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud must anyway have been pleasant to my little legs.

Very close to or so close to my grandparents and uncle-aunt's home, half an hour by route with names full of communard history, *Ménilmontant*, *Père Lachaise*, *Charonne*, *Avron*, *Buzenval*. The ladies, Mémère and Auntie, homeworkers, cuddled me more often than my father and mother journalists in this press resulting from the Resistance whose ideals were much higher than the prints... and the price attached to freelance articles.

*Combat*, *Franc-Tireur*, *le Populaire*, already *Liberation*, my ears were sensitive to these titles slamming like so many flags, long after they ended up with the pestle of the financiers. My parents almost managed to instil in me the pride of the journalist.

Pride, at least in terms of the written press - from the editorial writer to the columnist, the great reporter or the correspondent. The one whose pen is always on the lookout for the fact, the word, the sentence or the explanation, which he will be able to chisel while respecting the imposed width of the columns.

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<sup>4</sup> L'Abbé Pierre – Father Peter - was a French Catholic priest, member of the Resistance during World War II, and deputy of the Popular Republican Movement (MRP). In 1949, he founded the Emmaus movement, with the goal of helping poor and homeless people and refugees. Abbé Pierre became famous during the extremely cold winter of 1954 in France, when homeless people were dying in the streets. Following the failure of the projected law on lodgings, he gave a well-remembered speech on Radio Luxembourg on 1 February 1954, launching what became known as an "uprising of kindness"

My first flat rule was a flexible metal typometer graduated esoterically into sedanoises, gaillardes and ciceros. The love of words, the formula that flies, the title that lights up. It all started on rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud.

The dresser cherub recognized his parents by the ink perfume and the screeching of the sheets of paper.



## MCMLII SMOG

Between 5 and 9 December 1952, a particularly thick fog covered the city of London, causing the death of thousands of people.

It will have taken me a long time to become sensitive to the climatic cause.

This atmospheric indifference may be due to the fact that, as far back as I can remember, I was exposed to pollution. As a child, I passed four times a day by the Daumesnil breweries, which smelled of eddies and brewing smoke at the limit between Paris 13th and 14th arrondissements.

During summer holidays, when we visited Barcelona, the memory that comes back to me is olfactory - the mental image of a pestilential smell remains associated with this city, visually embodied in the cement factory dusting the bends when approaching Sitges.

In Poland, Katowice's coal dust smeared my shirt faster than I picked up cherries by the roadside. The drupe was crunchy!

In Beijing itself, for a long time I refused the evidence, until November 2015 when the particle density became such that for the first time, I had to wear on the mask then symbol of the city. Each cell phone flashed that day with skulls powered by the Clean Air APP that every good resident consult day or night to find out how dirty the air they are breathing may be.

It is, moreover, also the Peking experience that at least made me aware.

I was there when, in the mid-1990s, the National People's Army planted millions of trees over a few days to block the sands of Gobi which, every April, turned every interstice into a siliceous reservoir ; I was still there when, twenty years later, the decision was made to cut these same trees, to reopen a passage to winds without which the city was suffocating from stagnant suspensions.

I'm still there while government ukases are closing factories, excluding them from the capital to transfer

to places that are less attractive or more anxious about jobs. Filters would have preserved lungs in the capital city, but it would have been necessary to provide for their maintenance.

Better transfer pollution to areas where the labour force responsible for fouling would otherwise have come from.

Double benefit of a logic for which globalization is only an avatar of the deterioration in terms of trade, even if sometimes the prevailing winds bring down onto Beijing the miasmas that we thought had been expatriated.

In short - I finally understood that air is a precious commodity, and that it is undoubtedly easier to preserve it than to seek to restore it.

Prevention certainly has a cost, but it is that of living together!

### III THE MAN WITH THE WOODEN LEG

At the beginning of the fifties, we were just emerging from the Nazi occupation and its deprivations.

Paris remained a city inhabited by real people; its red belt was dotted with green. My grandfather had joined the ranks of the working-class aristocracy, occupying an intramural accommodation matching his social standing. Not that it was large, three small rooms, nor modern, one washed there on the kitchen sink and heated with coal lumps, but enviable because of its location that could not be more urban.

Past the fortifications, of which the symbolic memory if not the physical presence remained, even beyond the area, it was the grip of the workers' gardens – including the plot that fell to my maternal grandfather, who rallied it on his bike as soon as he left the workshop. This outskirts area was also that of wooden houses where the working generations who could not afford the luxury of " 1948 law "<sup>5</sup> housing, built in real hard material around a real inner courtyard.

Outside the walls, it was an expedition to join Montreuil and the hut of the great-grandmother - the one whose relative rurality was reflected in the nickname of Eggy Grandma.

The memory of the little ones is a strange animal. I remember very well at least one of these visits to Montreuil - it took the day for a round trip from rue d'Avron.

A very small lady in a blue apron, a small house with a floor and an external staircase. Also, her companion, we called him Mimile – short for Emile -, so impressive with his big moustache and especially his wooden pestle, memory of a war whose vintage I forgot - 70, 14, 40 ...

This visit was for my memory the first and the last to Eggy Grandma. When I returned to Montreuil, in my mind it was almost the next day, probably the same year, the grandmother had left this world.

Mimile was crying in his fangs, while the undertaker was struggling to twist the too wide coffin by the too narrow banister. Finally, it was winched through the window that Eggy Grandma left for good her first floor, before the raised noses of three generations.

I did not return to Montreuil, and the workers' houses must have disappeared since much more than a long time ago. But I still have affection for this

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<sup>5</sup> The 1948 law on relations between owners and tenants limited freedom to fix the rent for buildings constructed before 1948, which progressively became extremely cheap in an overall inflationary context.

connivance between the worker and the earth - a tenderness for the workers' gardens, or " *shared gardens* " as we now say, which still exist at the limits of some big cities, in France, in Europe or elsewhere.

Sharing of the callus between the chain and the spade made the working condition less dependent. Emancipation from the salt of the earth went hand in hand with that, even more hopeful, which transpired from the founding Marxist texts.

As a child, I locked myself in the room that at the time of their own childhood, my mother shared with her younger brother. Every Thursday I inebriated myself with militant magazines and other great stories surrounding the big bed in piles taller than its four corners.

Workers, peasants, intellectuals, the triple alliance carried by a single class.

MCMLIII  
ETHEL AND JULIUS

Not unlike several, it was through Chaplin, Joan Baez and Angela Davis that I realized that the blood of martyrs also stained the star-spangled banner.

On June 19, 1953, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were executed on Sing Sing prison's electric chair.

The American political machine took three years to complete this episode of the distant arm wrestling it maintained with the forces represented by the Soviet Union.

The fate of the Rosenbergs has raised waves of protests around the world, and the disproportionate nature of their punishment in the light of the damage attributed to them still plays a large part in the unconscious and the conscious opposition to what America, at least some of its leaders, presents as " values ": the supremacy at all costs of collective individualism.

Collective individualism is the search for maximum profit for the strongest to the detriment of the weakest, the illusion that the latter could in turn rise by trampling the remains of their peers, a mythical ascent justifying the assent of the dominated to their exploitation.

The elimination of the Rosenbergs - whom, in short, no one can think of as representing an extreme risk for the capitalist society of their time - testifies to a paradox revealing a much more optimistic reading of history. The United States, with its individual and collective enslavement system, its almost institutional poverty, its intensive need for disposable and unskilled labour, the contempt of the rich for their social victims, the arrogance of a ruling class whose only horizon is that of its own interests, the United States, because of their origin, their past, their current events at all times and their perspectives, represent a formidable melting pot where the forces of an extraordinary proletarian revolution may join together and take shape.

Those who watch over the pot have understood this. They know that in the end a unification of frustrations, the

organized force of victims without consent, in search of getting collectively rid of individualistic gangue, would be fatal to their plutocratic oligarchy .

The extreme brutality towards the Rosenberg spouses is therefore extraordinary in that it shows how right is the fight which scares the oppressors so much. Thank you therefore to their executioners for having, through their hatred, reinforced our struggle. Yes, thank you to the accusers, thank you to the executors, thank you to the sponsors.

By attacking Ethel, Julius, Nicholas, Bart, Angela, Martin Luther, Malcom, Charlie, Jules, and so many others you confess your fears, and thus confirm the reality of their dreams.

Another society is possible, of united and shared development. And this society, it will develop without you!

#### IV THE ACCIDENT

At the beginning of the 1950s, rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud must have been very quiet in the evening.

How else could one explain the bewildering spectacle in my cherubim eyes of a front wheel drive Citroen returned to the roof like a slide following a failed landing on the trees of the esplanade?

I don't remember if the back was round like the 11 model, or rather trapezoid as the 15 model, but what I am sure of, what I still feel the pressure of, is the reassuring palm of my grandfather .

We had to be on a Sunday or some other holiday and were probably going to pass in front of the scented attic of the bakery before getting back the apartment - Pèpère, Cushy, as he was called, did not frequent cafes.

No great exegesis around the Esplanade Roger Linet accident.

There was no blood, no crushed dog, just a 4-year-old boy of which this will remain the first true memory. The first memory that really belongs to me, because the event was so insignificant that it did not feed any family chronicle.

A memory, moreover, surrounded by very few others who connect me to this district - I did not go to school there, places in kindergarten were scarce, I lacked solicitations to forge my memory bases. .

My sister's passage to the exploratory stage of her baby life forces us, now four actives, to cross more than the Rubicon, the Seine river, to go and occupy a brand new four-room apartment on the left bank.

So, we must already get rid of the Steelworkers, the Ledru-Rollin school that my mother attended, the dead end of the Whale where the kindergarten crouches, which did not welcome me.

More than a cycle has passed - sixty years counted in Chinese way - but I still feel naively proud for having been able to wander on workers' cobblestones.

Like a class legitimacy, acquired by trotting my hand in Pèpère's hand, at a time when the 11 CVs still found their four rims in the air at the gates of Père Lachaise.

MCMLIV

GENERAL GIAP HAS A FURRY LEG<sup>6</sup>

*"Create two, three, several Vietnam!"* I am from the generation that fully recognized themselves in the apostrophe of Che Guevara.

On May 7, 1954, the French general in charge ordered its troops to cease fire in Dien Bien Phu, basically to recognize their defeat against the Vietnamese patriots, after a battle started six months earlier.

France, whose people rightly pride themselves on the decisive resistance put up during the Second World War against the Nazi occupier, failed to recognize the same liberating aspiration for the overseas nations - at least its leaders refused, until the universal force of emancipation compelled them to do so.

The upheavals of a missed decolonization began in 1946, with immediate oblivion by a bourgeoisie miraculously back into business that intended to act as if nothing had happened.

Do we know enough that it was the Michelin Bibendum interests of French rubber users that precipitated Vietnam into a series of thirty years of war which neither Ho Chi Min or Giap, nor Marshal Leclerc wanted?

It was Vietnam, it was the massacres of Madagascar in 1947, it was the war in Algeria, it was also the Congress of Bamako and the founding of the African Democratic Rally in 1946, as many clear signals pointing to a new world that the reconstituted Metropolitan political caste refused to acknowledge, with the exception of the Communists.

It is therefore the honour of the so-called overseas peoples and that of the representatives of the working class in mainland France to have very early on known and wanted freedom in solidarity.

To come back to Vietnam, rarely probably a people will have experienced so much suffering to finally consolidate an independence that at the end of the war almost everyone agreed to already consider as close by

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<sup>6</sup> In French slang, "to have a furry leg" - avoir du poil aux pattes - means "to be brave"



and legitimate. It took the obstinacy of several generations to finally put to the ground the deadly ambitions of the monopolists, the Clermont owners<sup>7</sup> or the hawks.

Among the heroes of this endless struggle, Ho Chi Minh of course, Nguyễn Thị Bình of course, who may have inspired Jean Ferrat for his song Seventeen years, but also Võ Nguyên Giáp, General Giap, whose name calls this chronic.

General Giap is one of the great heroes of contemporary history, for having commanded in chief during two colonial wars that he won with his comrades.

For fans of the satirical press, it is also famous as the subject of a drawing by Reiser which appeared in Charlie Hebdo first version, where with the legend "*General Giap has furry legs*" the author represented a Vietnamese peasant in costume of linen, hat in the shape of a limp, raising his pants on legs actually hairy.

Resistance of a great people, there are no small people:  
" *She was both shy and self-confident ...*"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Michelin company, which needs for rubber prompted Vietnam War, is based in the city of Clermont-Ferrand (France)

<sup>8</sup> <https://youtu.be/Rl76MLTMDcA>

## V AMYGDALA

The picture is black and white - but we can guess the chestnut trend of the curly blond ecstatic with a waffle cone of vanilla ice cream. Oral tradition has established that this treat was given on medical prescription. After a successful operation on the tonsils, prophylaxis at the time recommended cold.

From there perhaps dates my immoderate taste for ice creams, which addiction was only reinforced once we found our footing in the Paris Blanqui - Saint Jacques district. Every Saturday evening when good weather, our party moved to the Gobelins where, not far from the Manufacture, a terrace presented the scopes of various delights on metal cups, with lots of whipped cream.

If the weather was not so good, the father would stick to it. The very recent refrigerator then housed for a few hours in its mini freezer compartment two trays of coffee cream, solidifying as best they could in flakes and crystals. We did not live for nothing close to rue de la Glacière<sup>9</sup>!

Ice cream was not the only madeleines of my childhood. Others were more bitter.

No physical memory of my vegetations. However, it must have been the same year, the first toothache already opened, I still feel it. It must have been the same school year, laryngeal in autumn, decayed in summer.

Hay that day with vanilla delicacies. We were on holiday in the foothills of the Spanish Pyrenees and my hoots with chewing pain had ruined all hope of a parental nap. So, set off on the road under blazing sun for the three kilometres separating us from the village where an aging dentist fiddled with my gums in search of a source of evil that was only getting worse.

The man overcame the almond debris - recommending alleviating the painful persistence heated honey mouthwashes. The mucous membrane still full of the gall of the roulette wheel I cried in refusal of the burning of a decoction with rubber odours on a camphor taste.

Two phobias were born to me that afternoon - that of the dentists, whom I try to cope with, and that of the honey which always impregnates me.

As for the tonsils or amygdala, I recently learned that they got their scientific name from a certain resemblance to the fruit of the almond tree. This fruit also colours my first memories - not as dry nut in its pockmarked shell, but

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<sup>9</sup> Blanqui, Saint Jacques, Gobelins, Glacière are streets or sub-districts in Paris XIVth arrondissement

still languid and almost translucent at the heart of the Verdigris velvet of its Augustine gangue.

The bitterness of almonds, I know, can put you off, just as much as honey nectar attracts you. However, this perverse taste surprises and enchants me.

As if my brain, imbued with the consequences of ablation as well as those of curettage, called one by rejecting the other.

Lacano-Pavlovian<sup>10</sup>, my childhood addiction!

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<sup>10</sup> Lacan was a French psychiatrist, who believed the very sound of words could explain some mental disorders. Pavlov was a Soviet scientist who demonstrated that when associating a treat with an event, then keeping only the event, dogs continued to produce saliva even though no treat was forthcoming.

MCMLV  
DS ALREADY

At the home where I was born, we didn't have a car. Paris was gradually filling up with automobiles, of all brands and all sizes. The civilization of the automobile was, however, still only a concept for most city dwellers of this mid-1950s.

Still they were better off than the French average - it seems that the car fleet only included 2.5 million vehicles. Basically, a vehicle for 5 households, even less because many of these devices were not intended for family use.

Then came the DS - a flash in too calm a sky.

Not that this strange creature had the effect, through one knows not what miracle of financial democratization, of multiplying the vocations to hold a steering wheel, or had facilitated the assumption of desires hitherto repressed. The batrachian<sup>11</sup> remained an object of luxury - and very few appropriated it, which was not yet wearing shoes.

But the DS was something else - to use what Roland Barthes said very early on (*Mythologies*, 1957) " *the fairly exact equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals: I mean a great period creation, passionately designed by unknown artists, consumed in its image, if not in its use, by an entire people which appropriates in it a perfectly magical object* " .

Everything about her was unique - the name, a stroke of euphonic genius, the form, the origin, capable of igniting the imagination beyond simple jealousy or contempt for the wealthy.

The DS also occupied the rue d'Avron - the street where my grandmother used to go on Thursdays when I accompanied her. Not that Citroën opened a branch there - the population of the district did not host many such high-range customers -, but because the butcher - not the hippophages, the other, the BOF (beurre, oeufs, fromage - butter, eggs, cheese) had appropriated one.

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<sup>11</sup> Because of its strange front aspect, the DS was often compared to a frog.

People even tell that one evening, in her garage, the beautiful girl got mad, started on her own to press him against the wall and break both his legs. At least that's what was said on the sidewalk, shopping bag at the foot.

The DS thus created urban legend - it reified a France in search of a glorious future that was not warlike or subjugation. A kind of automotive Cerdan<sup>12</sup>, a grail that would be accessed in quasi-automatic sections, from horse to horse.

October 1955, Citroën at the Salon puts a national face on the automobile dream. This face could have been put off by too much innovation, it seduced by the choice of boldness. The DS, French glory of Batavian descent, careened by an Italian.

Avanti popolo!

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<sup>12</sup> Marcel Cerdan was a famous French boxer. Lover to singer Edith Piaf, he died in 1949 in a plane accident on his way back from New York after competing for middleweight world championship

## VI THE CROTOY

Le Crotoy<sup>13</sup>, locality of the Bay of Somme - this is where we spent our holidays, this year 1956. Undoubtedly among my first fully personal memories. Certainly not very extensive, a bit like a reel shot in super eight format, damaged by time - there are a lot of images missing every second out of the required sixteen, and it's practically black and white.

The beach - that of Cayeux - so vast at low tide that you doubt, from your grasshopper knee-high, that there is even a sea somewhere. But recesses in the sand which captures puddles just wide enough, deep and heated for us to frolic at leisure, shovels and buckets competing against splash.

The mark of the plural because for the first time also my bonus memories associate my younger sister. Cécile was three, I was six, and it was one of the rare occasions when together we did more than share a living.

Always the beach, and the discovery of shore fishing.

The majestic landing nets were for grown-ups - for us toddlers there was the contemplation of twists decorating the sand here and there. We understood that under the crust life was deepening - even if we ignored the words lug- and ragworms we sensed the thing and laughed nervously for fear of touching them.

Green crabs were another story - a few babies squatted in our wading pools, but strangely enough each accommodated the others. No struggle for influence with claws against shovel. Either the ponds were large, or the crustaceans shy!

Whatever, our parents were tracking the cockle - and we were helping. Once the breathing holes circumscribed, there was a rake to be used, so that the bags were filled with the rhythm of the tides. Enough to support the meetings with acquaints, at the end of the afternoon, in the furnished rented apartment.

I know that these bivalve feasts took place, even if the fishing children were not invited.

The memory still ... My unwelcome chatter earned me a punishment in the form of a temporary banishment from the gathering of adults for an aperitif where, anxious to know what world was promised to me, I wanted to mingle.

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<sup>13</sup> Le Crotoy, Cayeux, the bay of Somme are located in the North West of France, by seaside, some 230 kms away from Paris.

Shame and injustice. Ostracised, red burning the forehead and suffocating from outrage hiccups out of social exclusion.

I was six years old and had so much to tell!

Not as much it is true as what I knew I had to learn, hence this strategy. Convinced that I would not receive without giving first, I wanted to empty my bag then benefit from the words of those I would have blessed with my talking. Miscalculation. But a lesson well learned. From now on, I knew how to keep quiet and to soak myself up from others. A line that I have held over the decades.

Introversion acquired at the folds of the Somme bay.

## MCM BRASILIA

Brazil! The country that turns life into dream. Its football, its forest, its carnival, its beaches, its Rio man joining Brasilia at the wheel of a pink Mercedes sprinkled with green stars<sup>14</sup>.

It was in 1956 that President Kubitschek concretized the decision, enshrined in the Brazilian constitution for then 65 years, to establish a new capital to arbitrate the rivalry between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

Things had taken a long time to shake off, but then it was the forced marches - so much so that less than 1000 days later, the city of Brasilia was inaugurated. It was certainly not a township or a scenery background.

The project thought out and planned by Niemeyer and Costa following Le Corbusier's precepts was grand and almost complete. Commensurate to the sufferings imposed on the exhausted and crushed workforce to meet untenable deadlines. One was far from the ideals carried by the architects, but that mattered to the client!

Brasilia was not the first in a series of new emblematic capitals or places that powers refusing to recognize themselves as ephemeral wished to impose for their posterity.

Akhetaton between Thebes and Memphis, Washington to mark the new era of freedom, Astana far from Alma-Ata the too Russified which almost kept the name of Akmola - the White Tomb - before becoming Nur-sultan out of the first name of the demiurge builder, Naypidaw the ghost town still less submersible or permeable than Rangoon... Greetings to New Delhi, Canberra, Gaborone, Islamabad, Abuja and some others!

Changes are not always wanted, as for Bonn or Ramallah, they are not easy - the noble decision made in 1973 by Julius Nyerere to transfer the capital of Tanzania to

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<sup>14</sup> From a famous 1964 French movie "L'homme de Rio" - The man from Rio - starring Jean-Paul Belmondo and Françoise Dorleac.



the heart of the land and its people, as far from Arusha as from Dar-es-Salaam, is still in progress.

Difficult, but once the first step taken, people in charge will persist at all costs. It is rarely the peaceful reigns that generate such upheavals. Confronted with the worries of a power over which they have little control and which they fear to lose, it is the otherwise very fragile leaders who invent a future with a new see.

Just as if a great leap forward might abolish the risk of collapse. But not any one is King Louis the Fourteenth and praying on the marbles of Yamassoukro does not in any way guarantee peace and happiness to the people.

## VII

### READ AND WRITE

I did not visit the kindergarten. It was therefore without previous experience of social life that, as early as the autumn of 1955, I was plunged into the big bath of primary school. It is an understatement to say that the approach was tough. The skills were there, however, since from the height of my five years I mastered everything from reading to writing. At least this is what we believed in the family circle.

What was no longer a mystery for me was the association of letters into words that made sense. And that, by mimicry with the adults immersed in their media, newspapers, books, magazines, was not vocal. I was reading in my head - and silence was golden in an apartment immune from television, where the radio set only lit up for very specific portions of the programme - Zappy Max and Ca va bouillir, Ded Rysel and the Duraton family, Raymond Soupleix and Jane Sourza on the Bench, with the news to follow.

Book culture was silent. So, I could not express through my mouth what my mind was deciphering. I still remember this afternoon, we hosted relatives, my grandmother so proud of her grandson, freshly literate, asking me for a reading demonstration in front of an acquired audience, impressed in advance.

The object of the presentation was one of these large hardcover works of about twenty pages, half text, half images, where young readers were introduced to storytelling - Perrault, Grim, Andersen, I don't know any more. But the scene remains clear to my memories.

I sit ceremoniously on an ottoman, the circle of attentive listeners yawning in advance at a diction they expect perfect. I open the book - and my eyes run from top to bottom on the first page " *Once upon a time there was a great king in his kingdom ...* ". The page turned, then the next where the princess is imprisoned, yet another with the arrival of Charmant, another with, who knows, frogs, a witch, a cauldron, and so on until the last sheet " *... They were happy and had many children.* The book is finished, I close it with anointing, look up in search of the noisy approval which I know is due to me.

Opposite, it is silence and incomprehension: throughout my reading, which must have lasted ten minutes, not a sound had crossed my motionless lips. I had read - but *in petto* . Without convincing, but without being interrupted. Everyone was waiting for me to finally decide to articulate - and some came out doubting my mental capacities.

Writing was more or less of the same ilk. I certainly knew how to trace and compose all the words ... but only in capital and block letters, as a self-learned child I was not able to discover by myself the beauties of making full and loose.

In short, unfit for the mould.

My first school report reflected these shortcomings, relegating me to the middle of the quarterly ranking. My father got ashamed - much more than me, who easily accommodated this anonymity. It was my first time at school, and my last paternal anger for poor academic results.

I learned this family lesson right away:   Nec pluribus impar and superior to all...

## MCMLVII ROME TREATY

Europe was imposed upon me on the sly. And I was not the only one in this case!

Indeed, signing in Rome on March 25, 1957 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community - TECE - also known as the "*Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*" TFEU - hello acronyms! - did not raise a lot of enthusiasm.

For many it was only an avatar of the Coal and Steel Community - the agreement among ironmasters - and a sequel of the belligerent European Defence Community that the vigilance of radical forces defeated in 1954.

Nothing in this treaty between still very much Belle Epoque gentlemen to suggest, beyond the usual sentences on economic and social progress and - already - free and undistorted competition source of all wealth, which can lead people to think that their future was at stake at that moment.

The people, no one asked for their opinion - and one can doubt that this hexagonal institution - six countries, like the six sides of France - played a role in the events upsetting France in May 1958, barely a year later.

It was only a few decades ago that things deteriorated, and that this Community, by the influence recognized to it, became a source for tension and rejection on so many territories.

In Rome, the treaty had been signed between people who knew each other well.

Belgium, France, Italy - it was the pivot of the Latin Union. In Luxembourg, the little brother, French was also spoken, "*merci vielement*<sup>15</sup>". The Netherlands, a former French department under Revolutionary ruling, had to be there. And Germany had been waged against it so much that it was better to keep it close at hand. Besides, it was still occupied.

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<sup>15</sup> Luxemburgish dialect is a mixture of French and German. *Merci vielement* means thank you in Luxemburgish. It is a blend of the French word for thank you, *merci*, and of the German work for Very much, *viel mals*, pronounced a little bit the French way.

In short, the family.

The wolf came out of the woods in 1965 with attempts to break the rule of unanimity which until then had prevented quarrels from tearing the Community apart.

The chair left empty by General de Gaulle was reoccupied on the basis of compromise with the outlines of vital interests - but the lax approach was in motion.

From enlargement to enlargement, Europe lost its heart and that of the peoples. Under the guise of progress, the priorities once again became those of great profit.

Even if the economy had disappeared from the name of the Community, it never prevailed as much as when 27 gathered around a table whose guests mostly have only one ambition: to keep for them the silver cutlery , with just enough labourers to have it well polished.

## VIII

### SANILLES

The family situation had improved.

My father had started to occupy a new position. Perhaps the devaluation had helped - currency fluctuations had a big impact on the holiday decisions of my childhood. This summer of 1957 here we are in Cerdanya, on the Spanish side. Even vacationing on the Francoist side, my father did not have the feeling of betraying. He came to Catalonia, not far from where he was born, not to Spain - Jesuit atheism<sup>16</sup>.

My father did not really like the seaside - and even when we later won the right to shovels and castles, he always found an excuse to make us leave the shore for more pleasant stays. Olot, Banyoles, Puigcerdà, Urgel - Roman pendants to Tramontana saltworks. That year, the last before the acquisition of the first vehicle, it was Sanillès.

Sanillès - more precisely Balneari de Senillers - it is in my memory as a child a huge staircase leading from a common room to the upstairs bedrooms, staircase at the steps of which my mother came one evening to tear me away.

A nightmare had awoken me all in the middle of the night, no response to my nocturnal complaints. Thumb in mouth, teddy in hand I had to fumble towards the noise of the game tables where my father was busy as a playmaker, master of the Catalan cards.

My appearance on the landing, enraptured and silent, impressed by so many adults in evening dresses, perhaps vaguely worried about the rebuffs to come - the name of the nearest village, that of the honey dentist, indeed sounds as Whip - did not fail to surprise.

It took an interminable few seconds before my mother, all in a wispy dress, brought me back to the heart of dreams where I could snuggle up.

Sanillès is also a huge meadow, tall dried grass dotted with flowering scents and rustling with a myriad of butterflies and other insects.

The game for those who wanted to integrate into the gangs of young vacationers who occupied the space was to capture the green grasshoppers, tear off their hind legs and let them crawl until more agony.

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<sup>16</sup> The Jesuits were a XVI<sup>th</sup> – XVII<sup>th</sup> century congregation of highly political catholic priests, notably known for their skills in hiding their real intentions under cover of innocent speeches.

Pure cruelty and the worst cowardice - but at seven and without yet all teeth grown one does not necessarily have the soul of a knight and the vocation of a solitary. So, I bowed to these barbaric rites. Shame pursues me, and with it a great respect towards the life of insects.

Rejoice, mosquitoes and harvestmen: your survival today still largely depends on those mutilated on the savannah!

MCMLVIII  
TWO-STARS

I chanted " *Ten years is enough!* ", then " *Eleven years is too much!* ». Reader of Hara Kiri<sup>17</sup>, I did not take offense at the "tragic Ball at Colombey" front page. De Gaulle was the enemy of the people. But damn, what a career!

The Fourth Republic never ended getting caught up in colonial operations. After Madagascar and Indochina, Algeria had entered the fourth year of a war of liberation that the metropolis refused to name.

Common sense, however, would have prevailed. After the impressive victory of the left in the 1956 elections, the avatars of parliamentarism had nonetheless brought in early 1958 the anticipated advent of a centrist, Pierre Pflimlin, as prime minister (it was then said "*president of the council*"). Pflimlin was of the opinion that it was necessary to negotiate with the representatives of the Algerian people, the FLN, National Liberation Front.

On the day of the inauguration, on May 13, 1958, a committee that called itself Committee for public insurrectional salute was set up in Algiers, composed of young local rightists, supporters of the return to power of General de Gaulle and a few high-ranking officials. In short, the losers of the liberation war and those of the 1956 elections refused the popular verdict in the name of an interest which they claimed to be greater, that of French Algeria.

From May 15, General de Gaulle said he was ready to assume the responsibilities that the putschists wanted to offer him. Committees called by antonymy " *defence of the Republic* ", composed of soldiers and civilians, are formed here and there to encourage this inclination. On May 25 a rebel landing was carried out in Corsica to drive the point home and prepare, Gaullists and

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<sup>17</sup> Hara Kiri is a French satirical journal. When General de Gaulle passed away, since the preceding week fire had destroyed a night club killing several dancers, the Journal published on its front page the picture of a coffin with the dead body inside stretching its arms V shape as General de Gaulle used to do, with the legend "*Tragic dance in Colombey (Colombey was de Gaulle's residence), one dead*". This was considered by the Government as a major offense, and the Journal was banned from being publicly displayed and sold to minors.



soldiers hand in hand, a new occupation of Paris announced by an ultimatum with May 27 as the deadline.

All the cards of the castle suddenly collapsed - the Government resigned and on May 29 René Coty, President of the Republic, instructed the head of sedition to direct France. The National Assembly started with showing some reluctance - but the majority left crumbled rapidly, and 329 of the 553 members voting on 1<sup>st</sup> June endorsed the coup to prevent the announced uprising.

Then started 11 years of greatness or ignominy, depending on the tip of the spyglass. Over time, images and speeches, progress and setbacks will have blurred the original sin of the Gaullian regime - it was illegitimate, and its successes could not change anything to that.

As for the title of this chapter, two stars - they adorn the brigadier general's cap, but also refer to the theatre where Yves Montand<sup>18</sup> performed for a breath-taking recital that my parents religiously listened to on radio in September 1958.

Curious year, where communism blossoms in a thousand flowers, while the factious bring to power someone who, deep down, was not from their side.

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<sup>18</sup> Yves Montand was a very famous French singer and actor, known for his positions as member of the Communist Party - which he quitted in the sixties.

## IX

### BEDARIEUX

After Sanillès, we remain in the South.

Bédarieux is the village of Hérault department where my paternal grandfather - Victor, Leon, Marius - had folded his blouse once retiring from primary education, a life conceived as a priesthood for literacy - literacy for little Catalans then, during the so-called Great War, for Senegalese skirmishers.

Victor was born of a gatekeeper in Séverac which was still called the Castle, family cradle where there was a flock of Gruat before the famines caused them to swarm to Argentina. Victor had married Jeanne, the daughter of a well-known teacher from the Boulou region at the Spanish border. He had been a widower since the 1940s. Jeanne died of illness in Algeria - what was she doing there? omerta! - and Victor had lived since their retirement with his sister, also a widow, but before marriage, the one to whom she had promised herself having fallen in the trenches.

Living in Bédarieux by chance, the adelphic couple had been accepted by their fellow inhabitants - the aunt with her mourning and her Sunday veil, the grandfather deputy mayor on a right-wing list, also retired from politics, one of the four around the daily manila table at the nearest cafe.

Bédarieux was elsewhere – it was the place breaking with the well-licked daily life of Paris.

We went there at least twice a year. For Easter, we travelled by train, I had my eyes wide opened to peek through the windows the cherry blossoms and the Tantajo peak, where this famous raw ham was drying, the slices of which were always too thick for my distaffs. In summer it was by car. We left Paris even before dawn to join Catalonia, with an overnight stop in Bédarieux, 732 kilometres below. My father managed to arrive around 7 p.m., lengthening or shortening accordingly the stopover in Millau so that we could rush to the terrace when our grandfather ended his game.

We called him Pepe. He was almost as wide as he was short. If picking up grapes, which he did not do, he would hardly have emerged from the vineyard. He had the roundness of a half barrel, wore a beret, belt and suspenders over black pants stained with yellow towards the fly. He greeted us in feigned surprise, and we were entitled to a glass of mint-coloured water.

Pepe and aunt Lea (Maria, Julia) lived in a large courtyard apartment in a building organized around a vulcanization workshop. Inside enough rooms to get lost, along a huge hallway, where the clock ticked sounding day at the hour, twice, at its quarters and at half-hour.

In winter, we were there sometimes, it was cold and dismal under the huge quilt. Cousin Helen, already so adult in my eyes, brightened the living room. This was before my father refused to see any more his sister's family since her husband was sadly illustrated in Algeria, thus depriving us forever of the cousin and her dog - a royal poodle that I rode.

Anyway ... The hallway also opened onto a dining room where no one entered - except my uncle, the youngest of the three children, to play the piano that his parents' rank had forced him to learn. He played, indeed, quite well for my ears almost virgin of music.

For my father, it was the violin. I remember the box where the instrument remained confined. I perhaps hold my total inaptitude for the recognition of the sounds from the father's rejection of the imposed bow.

MCMLIX  
CUBA

¡Que viva Fidel! In 1969, I earned Spanish credits at university by dissecting a flowing speech by Fidel Castro. The hero also had ten years of government. But, unlike Gaullism, it was for him only the beginning.

Not a single crumb of 1959 had been missing to the glory of Fidel Castro, since it is from the 1<sup>st</sup> January that he flew over the country, the day after the flight of dictator Batista, before his triumphal entry into Havana on January 8.

This result and this new departure is the result of an epic story that began almost 12 years earlier when, in 1947, the young man of 20 years of age landing in the Dominican Republic to participate in an attempted overthrow the dictator Trujillo, followed by 1948 riots in Colombia, in 1952 a lawsuit in Cuba against Batista, then a fresh golpista - he needed to have guts for that too! -, a local insurrection in 1953, an exile to Mexico in 1955, a landing with a handful of companions in 1956 and three years of guerrilla warfare in a mountainous environment where nature left no chance of survival, which paradoxically rescued the mini-battalion since the official authorities considered it useless to seek to throw it back into the sea.

A romantic life with little equivalent in modern times - except perhaps on the side of Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh.

But what makes Castro great is not the epic, or not it only. What differentiates it from so many other heroes is the contribution that thanks to him, figurehead of the Revolution, Cuba was able to transmit to the whole of mankind.

Cuba is the strength to say no, again no and always no to the arrogance of the powerful.

It is the demonstration that the underworld and corruption can be eradicated.

It is the courage to build with own means a dynamic, united, educated and healthy society, with the generosity to continue helping other peoples.

The dubious pout (Fidel said " *paternalistic* ") of some do not change anything.

Sixty years of Revolution - another record - and almost as many years under American blockade.

With or after the support of the USSR, Cuba displays, without insolence, literacy rates, public health indices, markers of gender equality unrivalled in the sub-region, and even in the whole developing world.

Already in 1954, Fidel wrote: " *Robespierre was an idealist and honest man until his death. The revolution in danger, the enemies at all borders, the traitors ready for all stabs in the back, the hesitant always blocking the road: it was necessary to be hard, inflexible, severe, to sin by excess and not by default, the time when it would have been the beginning of the end. These few months of Terror were needed to overcome an age-old terror. Robespierre is what we need in Cuba, lots of Robespierre!* "

He was 27 years old and had thoroughly understood everything.

## X COMMUNION

After a somewhat chaotic start, my primary schooling continued according to paternal expectations.

To say that I was thirsty to know!

I anticipated the lessons, I read the books as soon as they came to hand, I soaked up the daily press without excluding any section - to the point that, on the day of the thematic assignment " *Say what you have seen on television one evening this week* ", I was perfectly able to complete my essay, notwithstanding the absence of a home receiver: I only needed to recall the criticism of Paris Presse, Le Monde or France Soir.

There are many memories of these years at school on Boulevard Arago - from the daily chocolate milk, Mendès France<sup>19</sup> milk, to the weekly film club; from the ordeal of climbing the pole to school trips at the heart of the capital city, a vibrant book of history; award ceremonies where I was put on to receive all the honours in the form of large and illuminated books, double pleasure on voting days – guiding parents to my place of culture, and rejoice in advance with a Monday that would be off, post-election disinfection of the premises.

It is a memory that dominates, and sometimes continues to question me.

At that time, the secular school spared the susceptibility of believers, provided they were Catholic.

No one could find fault with the fact that, during the year leading to solemn communion, a part of us benefited weekly, at the end of an afternoon, time-use facilities to better prepare access to the Almighty under guidance of His intermediary.

The others, disbelievers or repeaters, one doubled his class, not the communion, although a majority, suspended their studies so that agnosticism did not translate into a didactic advantage.

It was necessary to occupy these heads, not always blond. The half-class therefore became a choir, to prepare for end-of-year festivities. Not everyone excluded from religion has a seraphic throat; a new sorting took place which relegated me into the small brigade of falsetti, those who have the right to hear, but not to vocalize.

This double ostracism pained me. How to regain a social status which was not that of a pariah?

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<sup>19</sup> Pierre Mendès France was a French socialist prime minister who, in the mid-fifties, established that all children in primary school should receive daily half a pint of milk to improve their health status.

I could not consider remedying my hearing inability. So I tackled my lack of faith - at least in petto, borrowing the catechism book from my neighbour at the bench, and imbibing, at the row of the reprobates, with prayers and other theologisms whose novelty absorbed me.

This mystical-ritual crisis did not last more than the season of communions. It will, however, have some influence - not so much on my degree of atheism, which remains irrefutable, as on my ability to understand and thwart the traps of the spiritual.

This said, I betrayed the rational cause to remain mainstream. I feel sorry for this, without regretting it.

As I still feel a little bit guilty when, leaning at some counter, I do not dare to publicly refute stupidities uttered in loud voices.

## MCMLX INDEPENDENCES

During my first year in high school, we had to learn the capitals of a string of new countries replacing in our textbooks the AEF, the AOF and the Ubangi-Chari<sup>20</sup>.

The year 1960 is often labelled as that of the independence of the French colonies in Africa. This vintage is accompanied by a litany of national holidays going from January 1<sup>st</sup> for Cameroon to November 28 for Mauritania, with the Conference of French-speaking African countries held in mid-December in Brazzaville.

The history of African independence, however, has not known the sweetness that, sixty years later, the flow of chronologies would allow to infer. It took more than a decade of struggle and hesitation for the first Brazzaville conference, that of 1944, to begin to receive a follow up, moreover contrary to its postulate that a French African should become an African French.

The courage of Guinea Sékou Touré saying goodbye to colonialism as soon as in 1958 is well known - as is the duration of the Algerian war in which the year 1960 was only that of reinforced repression. The general public knows less about the massacres of 1947 in Madagascar which served as a warning shot to break down the desire for emancipation of the sub-Saharan peoples. And one generally places under a bushel the negotiations, the quibbles, the blackmail even having preceded the declarations of independence, the Gaullist power wishing to match them with guarantees on the maintenance of a de facto colonial guardianship before consenting to them.

The aspiration of the national elites to access responsibilities was real and strong, to the point of upsetting the cautious calendar of the French Community.

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<sup>20</sup> AEF = French Equatorial Africa; AOF= French Western Africa. Ubangi-Chari was a French colonial territory associated with Chad. Ubangi Chari became the Central African Republic



However, the metropolitan power had more than one trick in its bag to keep the hand - from the blacklisting of Guinea, to the refusal of the Gabonese choice to become an overseas department, via the contribution to disintegration of the short-lived union of Senegal and Mali, without forgetting the perpetuation of the CFA franc, a masterful tool for organizing economic dependence.

Independence has in fact hardly changed the situation for many colonists or even French civil servants, at least until the first generation of leaders, reluctant to refuse the hand that had guided them to the pinnacle, give up their place - constrained by the age, by illness or by the appetite of their subsidiaries.

It was then that the former French colonies in Africa began to experience the troubles and upheavals that the Gaullian hagiographers imprudently prophesied had to remain the prerogative of the ex-something else, British, Belgian, Lusitanian, mocked as allegedly poor decolonizers.

Neither the army camping on its bases, nor the CFA franc, nor *Françafrique*<sup>21</sup> could change anything: bluntly delimited by formerly slavers by conviction and by enjoyment European cutters, without concern or awareness of cultural, social, economic ties forging the unity of peoples, these territories could not become nations in the hearts and guts of their inhabitants despite the magic of makeshift flags hoisted on top of a mast.

Then came what was cynically predictable: the rat race, with some brief illuminations quickly blown away by a France where the powerful never skimp on preserving their minions.

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<sup>21</sup> "*Françafrique*" is the nickname designating the untold alliance between the former colonial power and the elites it keeps in place in former colonies, which it could remove and replace at discretion.

## XI

### DOWDY, YOU REMEMBER...

It is may be that the nicknames which the grandparents take on or which are imposed on them by their offspring - small children have little choice - constitute a cultural marker. At least that's what the teacher of 57 boulevard Arago must have thought, who was carrying out a life-size survey with our class.

So the grandpa, grandma, grandpa, bon-papa et bonne-maman, a few yaya, nonna, granny paraded - there were forty of us in class, before in my turn I named Frumpy and Dowdy ("Pépère et Mémère"). These nicknames dear to my heart aroused a hilarity which I did not understand but which made me blush.

It was only much later, when I discovered Michel Simon's song<sup>22</sup>, that I understood the territorial roots of this appellation. I was then able to reclaim the name - and the diablo mint. In 1960, a gentrification in progress had already eradicated the native Parisians from the Montsouris district.

Parisians they were, Frumpy and Dowdy, Pépère and Mémère. Parisians, and workers.

He, a cabinetmaker by family line, a family which proceeded from Luxembourg - the grand-duchy, not the garden – part of a workers' battalion to rescue the 1870 Commune of Paris, after that unable or unwilling to return home; she, Lorraine, who was called the Spaniard, a homemaker and a high priestess of saucepans. He was a "*broken face*"<sup>23</sup>, being wounded in his twenties in 1915, a trade unionist and a golden voice - opera was sung in working families.

Laughter from classmates did not take anything away from the tenderness or pride that binds me to this branch. The didactic roaming through the Pyrenees Orientales of the other grandfather - he was called Pépé, he swarmed in Arles on Tech, Banyuls and Coustouges - made me Catalan by intention. The rue de Buzenval is my proletariat.

The stories of the Faubourg, the weekly Thursday reading of *Vie Ouvrière*<sup>24</sup>, the braided nets for pears of vaporizers made waring their eyes under the thin gleam of a courtyard window, the respectful manipulation of the masterpiece cabinet made at the end of apprenticeship, a precious wood snuff-box house with a concave tip on the ridge where to put the paper, the kiss on rue de Buzenval when in the twilight on the way back to our more

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<sup>22</sup> Michel Simon was a Parisian actor extremely famous in the fifties. For the song "Mémère", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HosxAgmSzVY>

<sup>23</sup> "Broken faces": veterans from World war I having suffered serious facial injuries.

<sup>24</sup> *Vie Ouvrière* (Working Life) – weekly magazine of the French communist trade union, CGT

upscale neighbourhoods we crossed the workers in duffle-coats, on their shoulders the bag where the bowl was held.

Thanks to this Pèpère and this Mémère I belong a little bit to the working class. I would have liked to be able to transform this proud ancestry into real works - alas, my hands are as ineffective in shaping as my glottis is in singing. Vain were the attempts by my teachers to make me complete during long weekly sessions of manual work either a wooden tray or a metal calendar.

So it was misshapen or jerky objects that I presented to my grandfather. But since he knew my heart was therein, he complimented me.

MCMLXI  
GAGARINE

Grands boulevards, Paris. With my father, we leave the hairdresser. Paris Match has just been published. On the front page, a triumph with a malicious smile.

If there are universal heroes, Youri Gagarin is one of them.

Before him, there was Laïka. Then, a multitude of astronauts, cosmonauts or taikonauts, brave and famous in their local glory, but none that permeates as much the collective unconscious. This round face in a round helmet, associated with a spherical sputnik turning around the globe, each associates the image with a name and a destiny.

The flowering of cities, boulevards, roundabouts or schools Youri Gagarin is a clear signal: we are in the presence of a phenomenon of extreme scope, the association of a human being with his whole genus.

It is certain that Gagarin's personality, his youth, his modesty, his kindness, and it seems his sense of humour played a role in the scale of his legend.

The Soviet authorship of this unprecedented technical feat also counted - we were in 1961 at the heart of those years when people believed they were legitimate to dream of a better tomorrow, Gagarin was a solid member of this chorus.

If, almost sixty years later, when many hopes have faded, Gagarin's aura remains, it is not only because of the accident which so soon cost him his life.

This first human flight beyond the boundaries of living space is first and foremost the triumph of resilience - barely fifteen years after a war that left it bloodless, the Soviet Union was chess mating capitalism. The impossible legend of David defeating Goliath has eternal value.

This orbit of Gagarin, it is also the conviction made program that policy, in the noble sense of a government for the governed, knows how to take precedence over contingencies, since it is not subject to logics of short term and profitability.

There is no coincidence, everyone understands it: the United States, yet so rich and so fortunate after wars having spared their soil, could not win a race where no profit was to be reaped. In the aftermath of April 12, 1961, President Kennedy still refused to consider space as a priority activity to thwart Soviet expansion.

He quickly realized his strategic error, and it was the launch of the Apollo programme which did not survive the USSR. With its enemy defeated, capitalism no longer needed to stare at the stars. Yet this is what makes Youri Gagarin's immortal glory: the dream and the indomitable hope.

## XII RODIN HIGH SCHOOL

Time flies, even for children.

Hardly do we have the leisure to be finally installed in the classes that count, those second to none during recreation time, having finally reached the supreme step of the five years climbing primary staircase, that you have to migrate to another corpus, where you have to again climb the degrees.

So here I am in first grade at Rodin High School.

It was said to be a pilot high school, new and gender mixed at the same time. Not really in the geographical area of the XIVth arrondissement but close enough for my parents to obtain a derogation through one of these detours of which the union or political fraternities have the secret. I for sure was not the only to be "part of the family" that year. Despite the decidedly popular nature of its location, the Rodin high school had only one child from the working class in the section where I was assigned.

As much as I fail to have memories of the Arago school, the only ones that still remain are those of the chestnut trees on the avenue, as much everything comes back to me ecstatically concerning the high school - at that time we did not practice college segregation, a single institution over 7 years from first grade to the baccalaureate.

It was so new, so varied, so promising!

New comrades, new subjects - Latin, English, manual works, physical education, drawing, music -, for the most classic disciplines a new approach, French replacing dictation, mathematics the calculus, history and geography opening up to the world.

Another way of organizing time, schedules turned upside down from one calendar to the next with a notebook called textbook used as vade-mecum and access provider.

A cohort of teachers, men, women, some sad, some cheerful, some young, some wearing blouses, dresses, tracksuits, costumes. Transhumance from room to room, discovering the outdoors, the vastness of the relaxation area dotted with trees and corners. The gymnasium, the library, the film club, the fair, the visits to one and the other's home, girls who are not naughty, groups who are not rivals.

I was, from the start, like a fish in water - or more precisely like a fish free from its bowl, wriggling in finally fresh waters which it would be aware that they were leading to the sea.

No more Republican stickers to signal the right student. The report card condensed a whole school life, and one had or not the honour of being " *on the board* ", encouraged or congratulated. So I started getting my laurels crown after crown, and I'm not ashamed to say that I liked it.

I liked everything about the school, the way to get there, the waiting in front of the gate, the greeting of the guards, that of the teachers, the exit bell, the hubbub of the corridors, the calm of the documentation, the smell from the laboratory.

I loved everything, even when I was far from excelling, as in sports at the beginning or more definitely in the arts and the manual works, for which I tried if not to improve, to the impossible no one is held , at least, through history and theory, to open doors for me into these abstruse disciplines.

I wanted to be a nexialiste<sup>25</sup> - and was not far from it.

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<sup>25</sup> In his science-fiction novel *The Voyage of the Space Beagle*, A.E. Van Vogt's hero is a "nexialiste" i.e. a scientist who masters all disciplines at high level without being a true specialist in any of them.

MCMLXII  
OAS

History has its good guys, but also its bad guys - and few, in the contemporaneity of the terrorist narrative, give rise to more rejection than the OAS in its time. The dark shadow of terrorism invaded the evenings of our family home. There were talks of general mobilization, recalling demobilized soldiers, naming putschists and factions. It must have been serious, for me to still remember the mood!

The foundation of the Organization of the Secret Army, this is how its few active members call it - they were not more than 1000 to 1500 including 200 in metropolitan France with a much more considerable number of followers -, dates of March 1961, in reaction to the approval by three-quarters of the electorate consulted by referendum of the principle of self-determination of Algeria.

After a series of bombings and summary executions, the OAS, isolated and rejected by public opinion as by the army itself, embarked in 1962 in what it said to be an "*armed insurrection*" of which one of the first symbolic acts was, on January 4, the attack in Paris of the headquarters of the Communist Party.

The threat posed by the OAS to a Gaullist ruling still in the process of gaining power was taken very seriously, to the point of mobilizing entire secret service battalions and prompting the creation of a parallel force of action and diversion, the "*barbouzes*"<sup>26</sup>.

As if to give pledges of loyalty to the fringes of the population who would be tempted to choose the path of conservative radicalization instead of that, presented as innovative and more promising, of the neo-colonialism of a *Françafrique* including the Maghreb, the fight against abuses of the OAS justified in parallel the organization of a ferocious repression against the real or supposed supporters of this FLN -

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<sup>26</sup> The nickname "*barbouzes*" came from the reputation of these secret service members to hide themselves behind heavy beards (French "*barbe*") not to be recognized.



Algerian National Liberation Front - with whom, however, France ended up negotiating.

The massacre of Algerians demonstrating in Paris on October 17, 1961 - 9 months after the referendum of self-determination - and the deadly repression of February 8, 1962 at the Charonne metro station, senseless acts in a state of law, are first based on a neither-nor (neither the factious nor popular democracy) strategy by which General de Gaulle and his supporters wanted to establish their absolute grip on the society of the time.

The OAS will have committed hundreds of attacks causing the death of thousands of people between January 1961 and the summer of 1962. It was only after the ratification of the Evian agreements by more than 90% of " yes " that decisive actions against the leaders of the OAS were finally undertaken - all or almost all being identified, captured and tried within a few weeks.

Some were sentenced to death and executed - soldiers, they were shot. Others, the most numerous, were pardoned sooner or later after their conviction. The last wave of amnesty promulgated by General de Gaulle dates from June 1968. The issue at stake was then to attract the support of the numerous repatriates from Algeria, to counteract in the ballot boxes the rise of the students' and workers' revolt.

The Gaullist power, hoisted to the pinnacle by the proponents of French Algeria, then swore allegiance to nostalgia to stay there.

### XIII LLANÇA

We were accustomed.

After the Sanillès experience, all of our summers were Catalan. My mother had to win a hushed battle, however - now it would be the seaside.

The seaside or almost, the first year, 1959. The village of Llança was a good kilometre away from the beach, the twice-daily displacement from the hiring towards the pebbles was carried out on foot, each bearing its cross in the form of a parasol, of buoys, of folding seats, of towels and of baskets.

Sometimes, we went a little further, when the tramontane<sup>27</sup> hit, towards a creek below the road, accessible by an incalculable number of steps. It was called either the Cau del Llop - the Fall of the Wolf, allusion to the steep - or Els Capellans - the Cures, allusion to the discretion allowing to get modestly out from the cassock.

No more mountains, no more full board either. One had to put oneself at the stove - and the stove was to be fed with wood. It was therefore up to the children to go and collect the branches in the neighbouring vineyards so that the eternal lamb chops, already pulling hard on the sheep, were grilled.

The daily time which was not of road, beach, gleaning or nap, I spent it in the dust of the street, waiting for the local children to welcome me in their circle.

As they saw me every day at the start of a long summer - our rental was for the season, the Parisian grandparents taking over when the parents were back to duties, around mid-August - planted on the sidewalk, devouring them with imploring eyes, it didn't take long for my incorporation. This is how I learned Spanish from the age of nine - Franco did not allow people to speak anything other than Castilian at the time.

The summer was delicious. I liked Llança, the sardana around the plane tree, the games around the lamparos<sup>28</sup>, the daughter of the possible next owner of our future holiday home whose, while my father negotiated a price, I admired the new and thick fleece growing in the hollow of her armpits where I dreamed of snuggling.

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<sup>27</sup> Tramontane is the Catalan name of the strong north wind. Towards Marseille or Nizza, the same wind is called Mistral.

<sup>28</sup> Lamparos is the name of the huge lights borne by small fishermen boats to lure fish at sea during the night.

The negotiation was unsuccessful. We did not return to Llança, and it was in a nearby village, a few kilometres away, that I had to anchor my emerging loves.

Summer ended. It was already fall - the summer holidays really lasted for a whole quarter! - when the grandparents repatriated us on the night train. Last memory, the restaurant car, with the soup which jolted a little at the rate of the switches.

MCMLXIII  
JUST SHARING DEATH

In 1963, even without a TV at home, one could not escape the tangy image of Jacqueline Kennedy trying to climb on the trunk of a Lincoln convertible.

The assassination in Dallas on November 22, 1963 of the President of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, remains obviously the most striking, the most shocking fact of this vintage.

First, because the assassinations of presidents in office are not legion - Wikipedia lists " only " 37 around the world.

Then, because of the particularly dramatic characteristics - in the spectacular sense of the term - of an event which images tell the whole tragedy. Also, because of the paradoxical uncertainties about facts about which, although the entire world feels to have witnessed those, no unanimous truth could so far be proclaimed.

Finally, because of the personality of the victim, including his relative youth, his flamboyance. Some of his displayed ambitions - to end racial segregation, to stimulate the conquest of space, to help at international development, to work for nuclear disarmament and for peaceful coexistence - allowed to hide the darkest sides of his policy - bombing and defoliation in Vietnam, embargo and attempted subversion in Cuba, anti-communist obsession to the point of not disavowing Senator McCarthy, assumed links with certain Mafia caciques, which characterized this President just as much as a clan chief as his father had been.

President Kennedy is therefore not necessarily the angel martyred by the forces of evil that his hagiographers wished to describe in a legend.

Had been re-elected, and there is no reason to doubt that he would not have been, his politics would undoubtedly not have taken very different paths from those followed by his immediate successors, democrat

as well as republican: social drops to avoid social fire, an ocean for gunboats because this was tradition, a web of imbroglios leading straight to scandal and defeat.

In short, John Kennedy was not an angel, a philanthropist or a prophet.

A man of his time, sometimes perceiving in advance what was required to perpetuate the caste of finance aristocrats to which he belonged.

It is perhaps this slightly broader vision that will have caused his loss. Some of the masters of the world apprentices ruling American politics may have been worried about the unexpected reach of presidential reformism on raising awareness among those crippled under their domination .

It is in any case this less narrow vision and the ability to stage it that will have made President Kennedy one of the most popular American figures, at least outside the United States.

## XIV

### LA SELVA

Becoming a resident of the Port de la Selva for a full season was undoubtedly a step up the social ladder of Hispanicism.

Firstly because of the length of stay which transgressed the flow of ordinary holidaymakers. Then, because of the place itself, a village circling a sandy beach, attracting in reasonable masses vacationers from Barcelona as well as the happy few foreigners.

Each evening, two cafes offered open air dancing - with customers drinking at the terrace or congregating around the dance floor until blocking traffic on the only paved street, that of the waterfront. The aperitif session took place from 7 to 9 pm at the Espanya café, then the digestive one followed at the Marina from 10 to much later.

With or sometimes without the parents, we, I mean my sister and I, did not miss any evening. I had the opportunity to wriggle in rhythm - sardana, limbo, twist, rock, slow with closed eyes, sometimes even the tango, the waltz or the paso that my mother guided, nothing put me off.

Partners also were numerous - and I did not hesitate, from the height of my ten years, to invite the mermaid with whom, during the day, I pressed between the fingers sand saturated with water to build ephemeral cathedrals.

Ten, eleven, twelve. It was until my seventeen years every year the same plenitude - I knew La Selva like the back of my hand, and many, at La Selva, knew me. Not necessarily people passing through - but the native who saw me grow as they got older.

Bakers, grocers, tobacconist, ice-cream vendors like the farrier, the newsstand or the ticket agent for the weekly cinema in the back room of Espanya - No-Do news, noticiario diario as a prelude to a sometimes quality feature film, I remember Orfeu Negro which scared me so much -, the municipal library where I discovered Catalan in the few books escaped from aggressive censorship ...

My father, this sometimes grumpy bear, knew, once on vacation, how to establish links that turned out to be solid.

Neighbours at the beach, neighbours at the table, neighbours at random crossing the ritual paseo walk at the end of the afternoon, I inherited his network, which the parents of my child beach meetings fed in return.

In short, there was sharing of conviviality. Family was driving as soon as the bell struck the end of the school year. Upon arrival, the Catalan junction. We frequented among children whose parents knew each other.

Two weeks later, my father returned to Paris for a lonely summer, until he picked us up in the second half of August. I then softened my mother's loneliness by attracting towards her the equally neglected Parisiennes whose offspring shared our pâtés.

La Selva was a world, it was a life, at least a superb slice of a life. This forest - it is the name of Selva, coming from a few bushes on the surrounding hills which kindled a little every other year - sheltered me, fed me, allowed me to grow and to envision myself.

Catalunya triumfant...

MCMLXIV

DO STEP IN, JEAN MOULIN !

The art of speaking in public was being lost. Students were no longer taught rhetoric and the five parts of speech. However, there were still, in the sixties, some impressive voices.

On December 19, 1964, André Malraux, Minister of Cultural Affairs, writer, formerly a fighter and an adventurer, delivered the speech accompanying the transfer to the Pantheon of Jean Moulin's alleged ashes.

Jean Moulin is often honoured with the title of the most famous French resistance fighter. His name is in the third rank of those appearing on the pediment of public schools after Jules Ferry and Jacques Prévert - he barely precedes Jean Jaurès<sup>29</sup>.

However, as Malraux said, " *it was not he who created Combat, Liberation, Franc-Tireur* ". Its role was less direct, however, immense.

Jean Moulin was a man from the left, born in Béziers, close to Pierre Cot, who was Minister of the Air in the government of the Popular Front. He was arrested by the Germans, brutalized for refusing to sign a report favourable to the occupation authorities. He tried to kill himself for fear of giving in under torture. His act of desperation failed to succeed, and he was finally released to be, in November 1940, dismissed by the Vichy regime from his duties as prefect of Eure-et-Loir.

Placed on availability, Jean Moulin left Chartres almost immediately to settle in a family home in the Southern district of Bouches-du-Rhône where, less known, he was less watched.

He then endeavours to understand the functioning of Resistance, which is already being organized with the aim, he will write in his Journal, of " *doing something* " and in particular of allowing a link to be established between internal resistance and London-

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<sup>29</sup> Jules Ferry is considered as the founder of French public school towards the end of the nineteenth century. Jacques Prévert was a famous poet of the XXth century, whose brilliant and simple verse are known to most French students. Jean Jaurès was a socialist leader, opposed to the war until his assassination in 1914.



based Free France. His contacts with the Resistance are real. He obtains fake papers which allow him, traveling alone, to reach London in September 1941 and to meet for the first time General de Gaulle a few weeks later.

The General is seduced.

In December 1941, he makes Jean Moulin his civil and military delegate for the French free zone <sup>30</sup>, entrusting him with two missions: to establish in France a " *secret army* " under the sole orders of Gaullism, and to unify the various resistance networks.

With no other authority than that of his mission, Jean Moulin will carry it out.

He returned to London to report in February 1943, was back to France late March. He then participated in the creation of the National Council of Resistance CNR which chose him as its leader at its first meeting, on May 27, 1943.

All this, of course, is written more simply than it was done. It took a great deal of political sense and foresight to these men and women from such diverse backgrounds to succeed in uniting into an organization charged with drawing up a program from which entire sections still inspire the French people.

Did the occupant, whom Jean Moulin knew he was tracking him, wait for the creation of the CNR to better destroy it? It was less than a month later that Jean Moulin was arrested with other members of the Resistance he had called for a crisis meeting. Tortured to death, he will not speak. As his sister wrote, " *he reached the limits of human suffering without ever betraying a single secret, he who knew them all* ".

Jean Moulin had just turned 44.

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<sup>30</sup> During the first part of German occupation of France, the foreign troops stayed in the Northern part, leaving about half of the territory under the responsibility of the French collaborationist Government under Marshall Petain. The so-called free zone was annexed by German and Italian troops in November 1942.

## XV

### TRADE UNION PERMANENCES

On Saturday mornings, I accompanied my father to 198 avenue du Maine. He is there to hold permanence at the Union of Force Ouvrière Journalists of which he is the general secretary. I am like at home in the old Palais d'Orléans, a building on a courtyard encircled by grids which provide protection for myself and for him. I meet the activists, decipher the signs, answer politely questions including those of the union of Spanish republicans in exile where comrades are surprised that, so small, I speak Cervantes language so well.

This Saturday morning ritual instilled in me early awareness of union action. If, on a day off, we still woke up early to go to what looked a bit like work, that was to be important! My father therefore wove my union fibre - even if it tended towards other ideologies. He has moreover, casually, influenced my choices in many other areas, by small touches, each affixed in turn on the almost blank canvas of my premium years.

It was with him that I discovered the beauty of books, not only those that I could leaf through at home, but also those that we had so much fun shopping around with booksellers on the banks of river Seine - that outing was family oriented, Saturday afternoon. Zadig with red velvet binding on vellum with enticing prints; the history of the Circus magnificently illustrated; the journeys of the Rikiki family, those of the Fenouillard family, the Dubout train and Siné's cats<sup>31</sup>; the history of Science over a thousand and a few pages, I still have the volume that crumbles to dust through too much reading; even the Bible, black decrepit missal, we do not believe in God but we require knowledge to oppose It - on each occasion we returned with loaded arms.

Another atavistic feature, the outing routine - reproducing the same pattern, the one that worked and which has not tired us. Every Friday evening, procession to the same authentic Chinese restaurant on rue Royer Collard - it still exists, it is towards Luxembourg station; Saturday evenings, in season, Gobelins ice cream; Sunday noon, Fontainebleau forest with lunch in the same tavern with the invariable menu, tomato salad and roast pork.

Then the training - it is to my father that I owe my choices, Latin, Greek, mathematics, he had engaged in the same cursus. Curiously, he did not wish that, like him too, I then study law - he was proud of his membership card at UNEF, University of Lille, 1928 - but pushed me, the word is not

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<sup>31</sup> Dubout and Siné were two very famous French satiric cartoonist of the XXth century

too strong, on the scientific track. Had he not left us the day after my baccalaureate, I would undoubtedly be a reluctant engineer...

Last part of this pygmalian - sports.

My father played rugby league at the Catalans' in Paris. He deplored the puny character of a silhouette that penicillin had definitely saved, but which remained frail. I was ten years old when he decided to have this remedied by enlisting me to the Paris University Club, athletics and swimming sections - something to keep me seriously busy! On Sunday, good shape was kept by throwing weights, jumping in the sand and climbing rocks before a more traditional walk in search of chestnuts, chanterelles and other tricholomae mushrooms.

An impressionist father, whose every spot of colour still permeates me. I doubt that I had such an influence on the descending generation...

MCMLXV  
UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE

The first round of the first French presidential election run by universal suffrage took place on December 5, 1965. It was my first experience of public affairs. More than the appearances of de Gaulle or Mitterrand, I remember the teeth of a smiling Lecanuet, the brush of Tixier-Vignancour's hair and the tears of Marcel Barbu, for whom my father claimed to have voted.

The last President of the Republic not to have been appointed by the constituted bodies and the elite voters had been Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, preferred in particular to Lamartine during the censal election of 1848.

This upheaval in political mores results from a constitutional referendum convened by General de Gaulle in October 1962, where the YES won 62% of the 76% of registered voters who voted.

The referendum itself is a fine example of legal entanglement. The executive is appealing directly to the people on a project to effectively change the constitution, which should have been approved first by the two chambers of Parliament, where the majority desired by General de Gaulle was not effective. It is therefore a simple referendum on the organization of public powers which is put forward, by a fait accompli of which the Constitutional Court could only take note, failing to risk risking serious disturbances if thwarting the will of the General. In short, a coup inside another coup, that of 1958.

One can be surprised by the large majority of voters endorsing the controversial provision in a field where the only precedent had hardly been happy, the Prince President having concluded his mandate, in 1852, by a coup d'état.

It seems in fact that two-thirds of those who voted YES did so to avoid that General de Gaulle leave power; he had put his mandate at stake on the occasion of each referendum, the last one in 1969 being fatal to him.

France is therefore trapped in a system designed by and for whom we considered to be a giant, endowing with exorbitant powers under the ordinary law of other Nations successors not necessarily of the same stature.

Indeed, even if this is not frequently mentioned since one of the main opponents of the measure, François Mitterrand, occupied the position, French presidentialism is not accompanied by the safeguards that do exist elsewhere: neither impeachment or impeachment procedure more or less at the whim of the two chambers, nor revocation referendum.

No accountability to Parliament or the people, especially when the promises that made it possible to get elected are betrayed. Until the coincidence of the two mandates - the presidential and the parliamentary - which even removed the hope of thwarting through cohabitation the powers of the republican monarch entrusted for five years with supreme authority

The excesses that the institutions of the Fifth Republic allow are only the product of a system of representation by which citizens divest themselves of the power that the name of democracy seems to confer on them. It will be said that if the people choose bad representatives, they can always change them when the time comes - but, when the time actually comes, the new representatives become as irremovable as their predecessors, and without much reason to behave better.

Hasn't the time come to get back to basics - *"For though they offer us concessions Change will not come from above"*?<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> From the lyrics of the Internationale anthem

## XVI SEXUALITY

Time is passing - already almost sixteen, it is high time to move on to the founding subject, sex.

I certainly haven't been far ahead in this area. The family environment may have played a role with a few discouraging sentences gleaned very early on a slightly twisted lip, apparently a genetic inheritance without which my narcissism would have gone well, as well as a paternal modesty from another age when masturbation made deaf and the sight of a dick turned you into blindness.

Not that my parents did not have sex. I have three or four witnesses for the prosecution or for the defence: a film negative of my naked mother found at the bottom of an old iron box, my father without panties crossed in the middle of the night in front of the toilets that both of us aspired to reach, a charcoal odalisque hanging above the bed in the parental room where we only rarely had access, a very transparent night gown I didn't know existed until this day of paternal mourning when, the grandparents having moved in comfort to occupy the matrimonial room, the widow already in nightwear had to call me to unfold her sofa in the living room.

But things are the way they go. I did not know how to really take the plunge and contented myself for many years with loyalty to summer blooms - including a Catalan who, if she was not the only one, will remain the first and the least ephemeral.

Hand to hand, lip to lip, body to body - I experienced all this through more intellectual than erectile emotion.

My first ejaculation, I owe it to the expert but clandestine hand of an uncle whose layer of sadness I shared the day after the death of his older brother. I was going onto my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and had passed it when my first vagina, entirely guided in a hotel in La Selva by a Scandinavian girl abused on my degree of inexperience by a fortunate right touch in the dark accomplice of the reeds, the night before, just after night clubbing.

Age hardly changed my sensual approach: be I eleven years old grazing the hips of my cousin of ten, touching allowed by carrying the rubbish to the downstairs dustbins rue de Buzenval, be I thirteen and take advantage with my Barcelona muse of the brackish shelter of a boathouse to brush each other's lips, be I sixteen and contemplate under moonlighting the pale breast she wanted to offer me in the deep path across the reeds, being on the right track was worth my self-awarded satisfaction and discharge from obligation to dig further.

The situation became less simple when we started talking about marriage.

Endowed with a bride almost as unexperienced - perhaps this reciprocal innocence was part of the seduction - I had, with her, to train to finally achieve this coitus that we say natural.

It took some time and a few unsuccessful attempts, before a night of miracle in Knokke where the pairing finally occurred.

The burrowing head was not lacking rigor until then, only precision - lips did not close, but opened at the side. Groping that had almost collapsed a union yet strongly desired.

MCMLXVI  
US GO HOME!

We hardly saw GIs in intramural Paris of the sixties. The announced withdrawal from NATO did not really make me hot or cold. One can be sixteen and still miss the train of history.

The NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization had nonetheless occupied its whole year 1966 implementing the decision notified by the government of General de Gaulle to withdraw France from what was called "*integrated command*", in other words the American preponderance in the use of forces and facilities made available to the 1949-founded Organization.

The more than reluctant French attitude towards the mode of operation of NATO existed before the advent of the Fifth Republic.

It was in the early 1950s that the "*US Go Home*" campaign took off under the leadership of the Communist Party. The movie *La Belle americaine* (*Beautiful American (car)*) where this slogan plays a role dates back from 1961, even before NATO nuclear strategy reinforces the oppositions, with the installation decided without consultation with the allies of missiles under absolute control from the United States on European soil.

The Gaullian desire to recover the national autonomy in defence matters, materialized by the finalization of the tests of an atomic bomb, thus provides the climax of an evolution reinforced by the observation that the Atlantic alliance did little neither to help in colonial adventures which were not his, between a lip service to Diên Biên Phu, an opposition around the Suez Canal and strong criticism during the engagement in Algeria of troops initially intended to report to the integrated command, actually American.

The departure from France of NATO headquarters with tens of thousands of foreign soldiers sometimes seen as an occupying army therefore met with the support of a large part of the population.



In the National Assembly it was, curiously or not, the social democratic opposition which tabled (without success) a motion of censure against the government on the grounds of the insecurity created by the forced departure from France of the American soldiers.

Subsequent governments may have come back on certain aspects of the 1966 decisions - with in particular the return to the fold of the American-dominated command by decision of Nicolas Sarkozy - France nonetheless retains, due to the determined action of the sixties, a strong independence vis-à-vis NATO and especially the American command, including nuclear deterrence

Were it not for the firmness of the position taken in 1966, the acts which subsequently contributed to preserving France's credibility across the world and respect for its status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council would have had the greatest difficulty in being accomplished, whether it was the recognition of the People's Republic of China, the call for an end to hostilities in Vietnam, the refusal of the Iraq war or the support for the Palestinian people.

This (independence) lesson is well worth a cheese<sup>33</sup>, no doubt.

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<sup>33</sup> From La Fontaine's fable, the Fox and the Crow ("*this lesson is well worth a cheese, no doubt.*")

## XVII PRAGUE

December 1965 - the teenage eyes that fill the second-class wagon of the Paris-Prague night train widen in a dawn that struggles to assert itself. We are in Cheb station and are looking for this famous iron curtain, which we hear about since the Lycée Rodin, decidedly a pilot, decided to place its first snow colony in the Sudetes. My father did not hesitate too much to authorize this departure from his fundamentalist anti-communism, the time has come to peacefully coexist.

I do not keep very precise memories of this first stay, except that the snow was there and that we skied. Harrachov is a small, very medium-sized town, not too far north of Prague. The facilities are then quite rustic and the slopes reasonable enough to allow a quick learning to our party of polite and compliant young Parisians,.

Prague II, the following year, that of the baccalaureate, was another story.

First, the mountains were peeled, no way to slide there. Then, instead of the private chalet, this time we occupy a wing in a building shared with other young people, Czechs pursuing scientific studies and also on vacation.

Idleness facilitates contacts.

It is as a party - we practically haven't left each other since the start of the fourth grade - that Bernard, Bertrand, Jean-Pierre AKA Biké, Marc and I manage to interact with the Prague party.

To be honest, we intrude into the great hall of the residence where they spend their evenings with a little beer, a hint of music and a lot of warmth. We take advantage of the orchestra's union break to occupy the scene and chant Shakespeare in a caricature of modern art, in the simple hope of being noticed.

As ridiculous as it may have been, the strategy paid off. We were admitted to the table d'hôte. Boys, but also girls. For us who came from a high school where another kind of peaceful coexistence between practiced under the name of mixed gender genres, this was discovery of the pleasure of flirting without long approach or hesitation. Her name was Hana.

Jan was also at this table. He was studying French and electrical engineering. According to this charming custom of the time we exchanged addresses - it was before cell phones and WeChat - and stayed in touch once repatriated.

In the fall of 68, in full normalization over there, extended holidays in France due to the revolution being digested, Jan invited us to his father's, in Prague, Solidaritá district.

It was Prague III. Beer flowed, also the Bohemian pink wine. We spent the evenings in university halls where the socialist gloom was much happier than the sententious sorbonnism of our year 01.

For me, Mirka - little name of Miroslava. We were all to meet in April 69 in a pioneer camp somewhere in Moravia. Jan disapproved, Mirka's father was too high, too compromised in the Post Dubček Party era. His caution was premonitory. The days of easy visas were soon over, and we couldn't honour the Easter date. Prague IV had to wait.

Instead, it was Brittany I...

## MCMLXVII THROUGH ORDINANCES

Social security allowed me to be born, to survive, to grow, to find my way and to travel. The history of its mutations is fascinating, by their scope, and by their vehicles.

On three occasions a reform of social security was formulated in France via ordinances, these exceptional legal devices by which the executive power obtains from the legislature the authorization to reform as it pleases in one or more fields, subject to subsequent formal ratification .

One generally associates to ordinances the desire to go quickly to achieve a clear goal, without bothering with the frills of parliamentary debates that should not influence a result known in advance.

Works of the Provisional Government, the ordinances of October 4 and 19, 1945 establishing and organizing the social security system, universal, united, democratic represented a major advance for the population, while the situation of the country, barely out of a long and terrible conflict, fully justified forced marches towards a better future.

Is it because these orders were taken " *during the absence of General de Gaulle* " on a visit to the USSR, at the junction of two governments - therefore without his explicit approval? Is it more simply because, more than twenty years later, the new-fashioned Gaullism still distrusted popular forces, and had more means, he believed, of constraining them?

In 1967, the newly elected assembly included only a very narrow majority of deputies supporting the ruling power. Choosing the route of ordinances therefore appeared reasonable, on such a sensitive subject that provoked in May the convening of a general strike. The reform was therefore approved on June 22.

Carried out by Jean-Marcel Jeanneney, parricidal son of a Minister of the Provisional Government, the 1967 ordinances brought down the walls carrying the system wanted by the National Resistance Council - dividing

the single regime between different risks, and passing joint management under the de facto tutelage of the State, with the creation of National Funds made up of as many public establishments overseeing the entire system whose action and desire for independence they could censor.

In 1996, the Juppé ordinances completed the State's control over social protection, with on the one hand the reinforcement of non-contributory financing delegitimizing joint management a little bit more, and on the other hand the submission of health insurance to a logic of means, instead of the logic of needs which should prevail according to the texts of 1945.

French social security certainly has strong remains and can still create illusion.

The dismantling actions, however, continued throughout the first two decades of the 21st century - and with them the revenge of an employer caste never really accepting as historical fate the circumstances leading the Nation to privilege, at the time of a revolution or out of an upheaval, the well-being of all to the improved-being of a click.

## XVIII ANDRÉ

September 1967.

My father, aged 59, died last night, the day before return to school. I missed this first day, despite baccalaureate diploma in my pocket. My mother had awaken me from my very first sleep in the crazy hope that I could help - just in time in fact for me to attend the very last moments, from the depths of his armchair, vain gurgling struggle against the embolism.

Once the death acknowledged it was necessary to call for help from real adults who would know how to act - my mother was too distraught and I did not know everything.

The call I made was to my paternal uncle, younger brother by a dozen years, whose high-ranking professional status let me foresee that he would have interpersonal skills if not experience. My ringtones extract it from sleeping mists - Sunday nights are often difficult to overcome. He is soon there, however, takes a grips over the first measures, awaits the arrival of the second family wave, maternal branch, offers to host me for the night before breaking the assembly trauma - and here we are, West of Paris, I mean him and me, my sister joining the red suburbs area with the other younger brother, from my mother side.

André is just the opposite of his elder: tall, rather slender, elegant, affable, convinced of the virtues of the private sector, fond of art, of classical music and of beautiful objects, freed through speech therapy from almost any rugby accent, literate in classical Hispanic, single and practically publicly an homosexual.

Despite these oppositions, he has always been part of my family landscape, without knowing too well sometimes who, from the elder or the younger, protects the other.

The Anti-siamois brothers are in touch regularly. I still remember the visits we paid to that uncle whose career led from province to region, Nancy, Lyon, Toulouse before reaching to the Grail of the Parisian headquarters of his multinational, a year or so ago .

Since the links were further strengthened, we had dinner at least once a month, which we rejoiced, us children, because this somewhat whimsical uncle always came with surprises in his hands: a cake from a great maker, brand new products, food prototypes, one evening it was a chandelier to replace the light bulb that my father insisted on preserving hanging from the ceiling of the living room. Quickly to install - the uncle had all planned, carrying block connections and a cross-headed screw-driver; he knew how

to handle the tool as well as his brother, who noted the suspension, accepted it in good grace and even knew how to thank, which surprised me.

My father died last night, and I'm in Boulogne. André took his day, we distracted ourselves at the cinema, Monday afternoon session, one movie from de Funès<sup>34</sup>, I realize I laughed, so I cry for the first time.

André could not become a surrogate father. He had already promised Andalusian working-class parents exiled in the outskirts of Barcelona to shelter under his wing their pre-adolescent son whom he soon adopted. From this other, cross-border exile, family obligations were born for the unmarried uncle.

The goof of September 1967 became second rank in avuncular priority - I suffered a little.

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<sup>34</sup> Louis de Funès was a famous French comic actor who performed in a number of very popular movies in the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies.

MCMLXVIII  
MAY, JUNE AND MORE

I am from a generation with double or triple label, a baby boomer then a boho, but especially a sixty-eighter. The outlines of the " events " of May and June 1968 in France are sufficiently well known to allow an approach through the small end of the telescope, that of personal experience.

Quiet student at Louis-le-Grand high school in scientific preparatory class, I was amazed to one morning in early May discover the rue Gay Lussac, an artery crossing the Latin district to reach the Sorbonne then the banks of the river Seine, as if pustulated of paving stones, glass, carcasses of burned cars and various debris.

No doubt the radio had warned that the night had been hot and that the roadway was so congested that it prevented the passage of vehicles - which made me choose the half hour walk instead of scooter to join my class. However, I did not expect such a shamble. No more than the other passers-by, also stunned by this decor of urban guerrilla warfare. The authorities were not mistaken who, during the legislative elections in late June, had some car wrecks brought before the polling stations to emphasize in their own way the stakes of the elections.

Second episode, May 13, 1968 - a Monday of general strike and demonstration. For me, it was a protest against police violence against students. For many, it was more, as for the stepson of our above neighbour, an elected communist to whom my mother had entrusted my political inexperience. Trampling all afternoon, waiting for hours to start so much the crowd was dense, parade to the slogan of " *Popular Democracy!* " », scattering Denfert-Rochereau very close to a home that I join past the 8 p.m. journal having announced, says my mother, 30,000 demonstrators. The accounts were already distorted at that time.

The following days, the strike holds, I am in a lot of blows. I criss-cross Paris on my moped to, on behalf of the journalists' union, transmit the leaflets



" *Free ORTF*<sup>35</sup> " to the different occupations. I had the impression of acting as a resistant, libels buried under the saddle, slaloming between what I imagined police check points.

I took part in demonstrations here, there or elsewhere at least once a day, notably at the Charl  ty stadium where, seated on the lawn with a makeshift black flag between my legs, I chose Rocard<sup>36</sup> for its fire and flame. Perched on the roofs of the school then with only the interns prevented by the strike from leaving Paris, I looked down onto the barricades maintained, taken and taken over. From time to time, I passed an ear in general assemblies where I did not capture much, relying on rumours about a vacuum in power, a revolution in progress, a parachutist subversion.

I learned from the radio of a co-demonstrator the dissolution of the National Assembly whistling the end of a dream for a new world, even for me who barely knew the old.

I understood through the results of the popular vote the meaning of the expression " *Elections trap for dummies* ", in July I found that my summer job salary was 35% above the contractual amount through double effect of an increase in minimum wage and the abolition of the age penalty for younger workers, in August I go on vacation.

On a beach in la Selva, I hear that the Soviet troops occupy Prague, that the media make it believe that the PCF<sup>37</sup> only hypocritically denounces the coup, then I understand that it is time to take sides, and I decide to join the Communist Youth League.

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<sup>35</sup> ORTF, Office of French Radio and Television, was the public and only channel for TV news, and had the reputation of very much biased reporting

<sup>36</sup> Michel Rocard later on became prime Minister of Fran  ois Mitterrand. In 1968 he had just created a small left-wing party the Unified Socialist Party. Together with Fran  ois Mitterrand, French president to be, and Pierre Mendes-France, former prime Minister in the fifties, Michel Rocard was one of the few political leaders openly supporting the students movement in 1968.

<sup>37</sup> PCF: French Communist Party

## XIX

### LOUIS-LE-GRAND

As much as Rodin high school was for me a little paradise, my stay in Louis-le-Grand, which began in September 1967, was only worth its end in June 1968. I should have been proud to cross these doors, those that an august professor described there as " *the best preparatory class for the best high school in France, therefore in Europe, and therefore in the world* " - we really believed we were the bee's knees !

Louis-le-Grand was prestige.

The last term in high school, my father had made an appointment with the head of this institution for, he wrote in his appointment request sheet, " *an enrolment in preparatory class for entry exam to great schools of humanities or sciences, to be decided* " This eclecticism, I owed it to the royal Latin-Greek-Sciences path which he had imposed on me after he himself suffered it. The request must have surprised the headmaster, who agreed that, excellent in everything, I could choose where anyway he would welcome me, this I could count on.

The choice fell on me. I could overturn the family table where the feast promises made to me wore only the austere colours of the engineers' uniform - while I aspired to the shimmer of the verb, to the novel, to the theatre, especially to the poetry, I dreamed to become a Rimbaud with hugolatrical rhymes.

But I gave in. Rather, I did not dare to pretend to leave my beaten track. I could have taken the excuse from the general national competition where I represented the Rodine elites in Greek and English, not at all in algebraic physics, I could have talked about my notebooks, about this piece in verse that I have been composing for months in my secret alcove, I could have advocated about the classroom newspaper that I edited half Latin half French according to the inspiration. I could have claimed to remain a literary person in a superb and generous *coming out* - but I didn't dare.

So here I am, baccalaureate passed through and all too recent orphan, in a "*hypotaupe*" class - this is how the happy few call the preparatory sessions for scientific schools - glancing out at the neighbours who are called "*hypokhâgne*" - these are the literary that I could not choose.

I quickly realized that being first in the village in no way guaranteed a second place in Rome.

I had not been informed about the excessive prominence of subjects that handicapped me: drawing and a form of geometry with which I had little affinity (humour humour).

What made my glory in the thirteenth district, speed in deduction, audacity in handling theorems, elegance in solving complex worlds, was common practice 123 rue Saint-Jacques

I certainly shone in two or three sections, but this was not very rewarding, French, English, Sports. So I was mediocre surviving in the middle of the cohort, patiently waiting for the celebration of rites that smelled of dust as much as our benches did - the apparitor carrying his call book, the whistles welcoming the arrival in the class, the chalky caricature of the professor unveiled every Monday at the opening of the tryptical blackboard...

Slowly, I was on my way to a poor second year and a meagre success allowing me to integrate only lower-class schools.

The sixty-eight miracle reshuffled the cards. Since it was now forbidden to ban, the choice was back to me. My mother hardly had any scholastic religion, she of course let me with the choice.

In order not to offend my father's manes too much, I reoriented myself towards a medium path. Economics, which one already did not know very well what it actually was.

MCMLXIX  
A PASTRYMAN

July 1969, summer job, lunch break. We are a small group of trainees to pass in front of Luxembourg radio - RTL - while an aged small man comes out, plump in his three-piece suit. And the street to applaud Jacques Duclos.

It was in May of the same year that the part of France reaching political maturity after the war, that is to say a good half of the electorate, discovered a man of barely a meter and a half height, more spherical than slender, not hiding his past seventy years of age - and had appropriated him.

Jacques Duclos was the candidate of the French Communist Party for presidential elections called due to the resignation of General de Gaulle. Despite the success of François Mitterrand's joint candidacy in 1965, the hierarchies of the Socialist Party had not wanted to repeat the experience and presented a duo with assertive centrist preferences, a pure product of the fourth republic.

The Communist Party, which garnered just 20% of the vote in the legislative elections of June 1968 against 22.5% in 1967, then chooses to submit its own candidate. To this end, he designates someone who was not necessarily expected.

If Gaston Defferre, the Social Democratic candidate, is " *marked* " IVth Republic, for Jacques Duclos, it would be downright the IIIrd one. Member of the Legislative Assembly since 1926, the former pastry worker lived in clandestinely since 1928, his mandate as a member of parliament having not avoided heavy sentences for the vanguard militant of the anti-militarist struggle - in total 47 years in prison to be carried out is a lot for a man of thirty!

During the war, Jacques Duclos led, once again clandestine, the organization of the Communist Party in occupied France, the Secretary General being evacuated to Moscow. Subsequently, still a member of Parliament, then a senator, he frequently took over from Maurice Thorez who was ill, until, with age coming,

he gave up his place as putative secretary general to Waldeck Rochet.

It is therefore a man from apparatus, a pensioner who goes campaigning. First credited by polling organizations with 10% of voting intentions on May 5 and 6, peaking at 17% in the last anticipation on May 26, Jacques Duclos will finally get 21.5% of the vote, failing by only 300,000 votes to qualify for the second round.

The explanations were not lacking, which justify this formidable feat - all or almost are due to the personality of the candidate, his roundness, his accent, his bonhomie, his talents as a speaker, his television presence ...

This personalization is true, probably a lot of truth to account for the result.

But the latter also participates to another logic: France was emerging from ten years of Gaullism, whose justly contemptuous rejection of the arrangements of the apparatus had permeated people's minds; France also came out of May-June 1968, with still in the mouth despite the electoral defeat " *that taste of happiness that makes (the) lip dry* ".

Such was also the candidacy of Jacques Duclos: that of the only major party protected from the discredit of old machineries because of its withdrawal from power since 1947; that of a party that knew how to mobilize youth and claimed to be there present for whoever in France belonged to popular opinion.

When Jacques Duclos died in 1975, we were 200,000 to follow his coffin.

## XX MONIQUE

At the end of Spring 1968, the Czechoslovak regime had decided to tighten up its visa policy. Convinced that we would not be able to pass through the meshes, our small troop was in search of an Easter alternative. Bertrand offers his grandparents' vacant house to spend the long week-end holidays, rustic atmosphere but guaranteed animation.

So here we go for the Monts d'Arrée<sup>38</sup>. Finally, three of us take an endless train on Saturday. Picked up from Morlaix station by an acquaintance, en route to the Helas Huella, village of Locmaria-Berrien.

In the evening, there is a ball, like every Saturday. The friend who drives us is our ages, his four new wheels barely offered by parents. To show the flexibility of the machine and the quality of its handling, he screeches through all the turns of the Huelgoat forest - and the inevitable happens: barrels, ditch, you have to get out through the broken windows and go and report property damage to parents. The friend, a gentle giant, already wrestling champion, is collapsed in shame - which no doubt moves the father who entrusts him with the keys of his own car so that our evening is not otherwise spoiled.

It's late, we're going as close as possible, a country nightclub, the Lit Clos<sup>39</sup>. We drink a lot there at the bar, where we chat and sometimes quarrel. For those who wish and can, dance is possible. I hardly drink, I do not hear much at the surrounding debates and blush in advance with the idea of inviting to dance. The American quarter of an hour<sup>40</sup> saved my day. A girl from a group where Bertrand knew a few individuals comes to me.

We trample together, it's the languid hour between two Jerk-Madison episodes. Vital but summary information is exchanged - the name, the place of origin, the studies, the vacation - so that, when our respective repatriations separate us, I know enough to plan from the Helas loft the journey which tomorrow will bring me to her.

It's sunny this Sunday - more beautiful than expected. Brittany's not always usurped reputation had made me bring me well waterproof boots, they are the ones I put on for a walk of some three hours, gourd and sandwich in messenger bag. Arriving near the goal, I realize that I only have a very vague

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<sup>38</sup> Monts d'Arrée (French version of Britt language Menez Are "*Rocky Mountains*") is a landlocked territory in central Finistère district ("*End of the Earth*") in Western Brittany. Its landscape is very rural, it has the reputation of a land of mystery and fairy tales.

<sup>39</sup> The lit clos ("*box bed*") is a typical piece of furniture from Brittany and parts of Britain. "*The box-bed is closed on all sides by panels of wood. One enters it by removing curtains, opening a door hinge or sliding doors on one or two slides. The bed is placed on short legs to prevent moisture due to a dirt floor.*" (from Wikipedia)

<sup>40</sup> The American Quarter of an hour (Ladies' choice) is a period of 15 minutes when, during ball sessions, it is up to girls to invite boys for dancing.

indication to find my way in what turns out to be more than a village - I had fortunately retained that the uncle hosting my dancer was a local postman, which allows me to knock at the right door.

She's the one who opens, no doubt taken aback - we didn't have cell phones at the time to warn about forthcoming visits, and the landline was not commonplace in rural areas - but happy to see me. At least that's what I easily convince myself of, in view of the country pleasures she makes me share on the grass with the blossoming flowers of this beginning of April. At the end of the afternoon, I would have to leave, but no vehicle to repatriate me.

They invite me, they feed me, they inform about my bedding arrangements through a message to one of the taverns where Bertrand is pint-holding. I stay in the big bed of a son who returning very late at night was not offended to find me cuckooing his room.

Monday next day, thanks, effusions, exchanges of real addresses with real numbers, promise to see each other again in the coming week - I am walking again.

Arrival at the town at the foot of the hill - Helas-Huella is Helas from the Top -, Bertrand's parents are expecting me more than impatiently - I had forgotten about the time of our return to Paris.

But I don't care much. I love, and I have hope. So many chances cannot really happen by chance! This is how life begins to last for half a century...

MCMLXX  
BLACK SEPTEMBER

There was no shortage in internationalist causes during my teen years. There was Vietnam and there was Cuba, there was already Palestine.

On September 17, 1970, the Jordanian army shelled and destroyed Palestinian refugee camps, considered because of their number, their organization and their progressive political orientation as a threat to a monarchy whose only legitimacy was to have been installed by a colonial power, the United Kingdom. This enthronement was carried out in collusion with other powers (including France) holding " mandates " in the sub-region after the defeat of overlord Turkey, an ally of Prussia during the First World War.

This retaliatory action is thus the heir to reciprocal interference in internal affairs of the peoples of Palestine who had lived in harmony for centuries.

It took place in a context of radicalization of the struggle of the Palestinian people to have honoured their historic rights to existence, recognized through never applied United Nations General Assembly resolutions. The Jordanian intervention has caused thousands of civilian casualties and has continued until today to produce effects in time and space.

The disastrous result of intervention in local affairs by major powers playing sorcerer's apprentice is unfortunately not limited to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even if the latter shows in an exemplary manner what should have been avoided. Many are the successive errors, over several decades, of State powers self-assuming, one after the other, the right to decide by the mere factor of a temporary strength.

In recent times, in short since the advent and then the collapse of the Soviet Union which, *volens nolens*, counter-weighted the blind arrogance of the Western powers self-declared to be great, examples abound of terrifying mistakes: postcolonial refusal opposed to the government of Patrice Lumumba leading to famine in Biafra and Tshombé in Zaire; in Iran, conviction of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh dismissed by a CIA



at the orders of the oil companies prefacing Khomeini; allegations against Saddam Hussein or Bashar el Assad leading straight to September 11 and the organization of the Islamic State; anti-Bolivarian blindness of the Monroe doctrine justifying the creation, still the CIA, of the military school of the Americas from which so many putschists and dictators emerged, etc.

While the reading of history often recognizes in the end the overwhelming responsibility of the troublemakers from Western or North America in the disasters that follow their interference, the same criticism is still not commonly accepted regarding the circumstances leading to the creation of the state of Israel.

The resemblance is however obvious in consequences - since we are talking about a *de facto* theocratic regime, refusing to comply with international law, practicing apartheid and discrimination, allowing or even encouraging violence against populations that as an occupying power it is required to protect under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

It is time for the eyes to open and actions to follow - failing which States supposed to lead the way will vacate even more credibility from these universal rights that founded them.

## XXI WEDDING

It was not a long engagement, not even from Easter to Summer 1970, just a few weeks once the decision had been made. To reach to the goal, there were a few hiccups.

As of the enthronement spent under the Carhaisian sun, we have, as one says, visited each other assiduously. I discovered the suburbs. Just having to take a train to get there made Versailles a world apart for me. Monique became familiar with the capital, from which even in 1968 the Orsay campus had only heard rumours.

Monique's parents had left Finistère where the farm was decidedly too small the day after the war. There were four children, two would be workers in the city, masons then foremen to avoid being locked up in the factories, unbearable to whom had already enjoyed the openness of the fields; two would remain in the countryside, a daughter to marry and another son, the one who had studied, finding a spot in the local administration. And all these quite very red, conformity to Horse of Pride<sup>41</sup>!

Our families were brought into contact - gentle approach, strong encroaching. My mother, recently liberated from the Marshall Plan, easily integrated the peasant-worker context of my future alliance. Good food, large tables, making the world new again and staying together, that suited her.

No obstacle on the side of the friends - mine at least, my party of four welcomed Monique, complimented me on the quality of her intelligence, and the length of her legs.

From her side, not really osmosis however with those who then surrounded her. They were too urban for me and knew her too well. The rare times when she convinced me to visit them at her arm, I put the best of my unwillingness into it, claiming an intense fatigue to very soon disappear for a late nap on the bed used as a cloakroom. Monique woke me up when she was about to leave.

In short, everything was fine, but nothing was going well.

No progress. Our relation remained semi platonic, became a little tingled when someone else deflowered her during the summer holidays which separated us – we each had commitments made that we did not wish to give up, the prey for the shadow -, accelerated a bit because of the marriage of her first younger sister - they were three girls - which we completed with a

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<sup>41</sup> Horse of Pride, le Cheval d'orgueil, is a book describing daily life in the 1930s in Central Brittany. The Horse of Pride is the horse on which family heads, carrying a red flag, moved to the farm to city hall, escorting their siblings to go to polls on voting days.

Southern trip on board the family 404 Peugeot which a license finally obtained allowed me to drive if not to master, but then, stagnation.

This calm suited me very well. I was growing sentimental bacon while frolicking in my comfort zone. However, Monique saw further, higher, faster. No doubt she had also received long-term offers, in this parallel life that our intermittence - each at home, each his university, almost each his party - allowed her to keep. Letters found suggest it.

As for me, who did not really consider myself a finished top-quality product, neither grown up, nor breadwinner, nor qualified, I kept on eluding the future.

We were a year old when the ultimatum burst out: marry me, or I leave you. I saw the critical seriousness in the blue of her eyes. The same evening, I transmitted to my mother, taking over me the marital injunction. I don't think she was surprised, she had well gauged the strength of her daughter-in-law - in any case she acceded.

And here we are in front of the mayor of Versailles, June 21, 1970.

I'm not sure I fully understood why I am here - but I'm glad to be there.

MCMLXXI

## THE TIME OF CHERRIES

Responding to the call by the Communist Party, the CGT union and other progressive organizations, Monique, tens of thousands of people and I were parading on Sunday May 23, 1971 in Paris, from Republic square to the Père Lachaise cemetery, to pay tribute to the Paris Commune on the occasion of its centenary.

At the Communards' Wall, erected in the cemetery in memory of the executed communards then in that of other workers' leaders, Georges Marchais (communist leader) and François Mitterrand (former Left Union presidential candidate) side by side greeted the delegations. Other organizations, reformists, Trotskyists or anarchists, had not wished to mix their good grain with this tares, separately organizing their own celebrations. The commemoration of the Commune was also an important moment in many foreign countries, especially the so-called socialist countries for which it remained a reference.

The Paris Commune lasted only ten weeks from March 18 to May 28, 1871. Its influence around the world is however much greater than that of regimes that sometimes covered ten centuries or more.

The 1871 proclamation takes place under the inspiration of both the first Paris Commune, a Robespierre's insurrectional commune of 1792, and the workers' revolution during the days of June 1848.

The Commune is the result of a combination of circumstances under which prevails, for a largely working-class and needy Parisian population, the feeling of being betrayed by its leaders.

The capitulation in front of the Prussians of the crypto-monarchist government of Thiers is considered as an affront by the people of Paris who, after having overthrown the imperial throne, heroically resisted the pangs of the siege and blockade of the previous winter.

The regular army's attempt to disarm Paris on March 18, 1871, in particular through recovering its guns, was the triggering factor. The people oppose the troop, fraternize with it. The government fled and returned

to Versailles, followed by officials and the bourgeoisie of the upscale neighbourhoods. The people of Paris are alone within its walls.

In a few weeks, everything is organized.

Elections on March 26 to appoint the 92 members of the Council of the Commune with a majority - Blanquist - and a minority - Proudhonian<sup>42</sup> - who sit and govern together.

Ministries are in the form of 9 Commissions appointed on March 29. Emergency measures to extinguish debts and fight poverty are adopted, followed by a detailed program approved on April 19 where social, economic, administrative, cultural and societal measures are found.

The legislative work of the Commune is immense, even if most of its forces are mobilized by the fight against the reaction which will eventually triumph and celebrate its victory by the bloodbath and the carts to exile that are well known.

The Commune is therefore not just revolutionary romanticism - it is popular courage, intelligence and pragmatism. Hope too, invincible:

*- They will soon feel, God forgive, That the Commune is not dead ...<sup>43</sup>*

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<sup>42</sup> Auguste Blanqui was a French socialist leader of the XIXth century who spent a lot of his time in prison, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon is considered as one of the leading thinkers of anarchism.

<sup>43</sup> "Ils sentiront dans peu Nom de Dieu qu'la Commune n'est pas morte" - from a popular song entitled "The Commune is not dead", title also frequent in books, essays, theater plays, movies ...

## XXII

### PARIS MY CITY

I was born in Paris - XIVth arrondissement, the 204th baby in this case for the first 9 days of March 1950; it corresponds to roughly 20 babies a day, a good production. I dropped Parisian residency after more than a quarter of a century. Being son and grandson of Parisians, I knew my city, its districts, its customs and its language, at least what it was at a time already a little distant.

Paris is an accent with impossible Rs, and a vocabulary. It is also contrasts, and oppositions, with an impressively efficient intramural transport network, especially the metro - allow 5 minutes to get to a station, 90 seconds per stop, one more station if connection and you have a reliable estimate of travel time. With, refinement, the almost intuitive knowledge of the location at the head or tail of the exits.

A Parisian locates his home and his places of activity by the nearest station - I thus lived towards Saint-Jacques, visited my grandparents in Nation, worked at Franklin-Roosevelt, studied rather towards Odéon than in Saint Michel ...

But a Parisian lives in a discontinuous city, without knowing much about the intermediate points on his usual journeys.

Thus, while I visited very regularly Porte d'Orléans, whose avenue was home to the life of the district beyond everyday life, it was only when my mother acquired for our young couple of a two-bedroom apartment under the eaves rue Didot, just a mile, that I discovered the existence of the Pleasure (Plaisance) district - what a pretty name.

Certain names of Paris are, it is true, a delight.

As a child I liked to cross the border to go to the 13th precinct, on the Quails' Hill – la Butte aux Cailles, to carry there for developing the super 8 films my father shot Sunday after Sunday. Also go to the Dairy in Freezing Street rue de la Glacière, where once the refreshing breads transported in winter from distant peaks were buried until summer when they were used for the well-being of the rich and powerful. Going to school, I skirted the Issoire Tomb, named after this giant shot dead by I do not know whom, whose fall created the gap which bears his name. In high school, I was in the Beard Collapsing Croulebarbe district, where the Bièvre river flowed which reminds of beavers. And in the evening, sometimes, going to the music hall towards Montparnasse, I went up the Merry Street rue de la Gaîté as one puts on pearls...

I walked Paris a lot. Rereading its dextrorotatory plan, it seems to me that there is hardly a district where I have no memory, and they are eighty, the districts of Paris!

The decision once made that my future would lie on the side of Geneva lake, I feared suffering from remoteness. This was however not the case. When by chance I found my city back, it was as a visitor confirming the past. Paris was frozen in my memory, a snapshot of life slices through which I tried to have the décor revived. Then, one day of a short visit, I realized that the metro was running too fast, that it was scabrous to be thus deported from one foot to the other and unbalanced with each curvature of the rail screaming in its tunnel.

Having become provincial, I had crossed the invisible line of demarcation and stigma.

Parigot, calf's head, Parisian, dog's head<sup>44</sup>!

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<sup>44</sup> Parigot is slang for Parisian. "Parigot tête de veau, Parisien tête de chien" is a popular Provincial rhyme pretending to be offending towards people from Paris.

MCMLXXII  
PING-PONG

When I was still a high school student, PR of China was already for me the very evidence of a great country. General de Gaulle's vista had provided for this. Others, however, procrastinated more. It was on February 21, 1972 that the President of the United States, Richard Nixon, arrived in Beijing for a week-long visit, ending more than twenty years of mutual ignorance.

It is common to say that this visit was made possible by the positive - and largely coincidental - contacts maintained between the male ping-pong teams of the two countries since the world championships in Nagoya (Japan) during the spring of the previous year.

The visit had obviously been otherwise prepared, notably through discreet visits by the National Security Advisor, future Secretary of State (Minister for Foreign Affairs) Henry Kissinger, and President Nixon had announced his visit in July 1971.

The United States was more and more isolated in its refusal to recognize the legitimacy established at least through the duration of those who governed the Republic of China turned People's Republic for more than twenty years.

While France had restored diplomatic ties in 1964 - which explains while a statue of General de Gaulle occupies a prominent place in the great hall of the national museum in Beijing - it was not until 1970 that a majority of the United Nations General Assembly decided in favour of replacing the representation of Taiwan by that of People's Republic of China.

The beginning of normalization between the two countries came at a time when the Cultural Revolution was not just a memory. Mao Zedong and Zhu Enlai had just regained control of the country after the storm unleashed by the first named against the attempts at economic reformism advocated by certain fringes of the Communist Party following the painful failures of the early sixties.



To reconnect at that time was to show a political audacity that otherwise hardly characterizes the Nixon presidency. For their part, Mao Zedong and Zhu Enlai, who undoubtedly had bigger fish to fry, did not seem particularly favourable to the " *diplomacy of table tennis players* ", which they nevertheless ended up accepting as a *fait accompli* .

This visit and the undeniable success it represented for the aura, then badly dehorned, of the Americans, out of breath in Vietnam whose war they were trying to export to neighbouring countries, must undoubtedly be attributed to the know-how of Henry Kissinger.

The latter is a character as influential as controversial - to whom the award, in 1973, of the Nobel Prize for Peace together with his Vietnamese counterpart who refused him, made Françoise Giroud say that he was a Nobel laureate of 'gallows humour'.

Whatever Machiavellian, even harmful, that Kissinger was, he will, through this 1972 visit, have enabled People's Republic of China to regain its place in the concert of Nations, without yielding anything in terms of principles. This same PR China, on the brink of collapse at the beginning of the 1970s, has almost without making a mark a superpower fifty years later.

Kissinger has a lot to do with it, but does he kick himself for this?

Mankind Festival was for a reasonable duration, say almost ten years, my cultural exception.

I have bad experience with gregarious events. This was thus described in a personality test where I discovered myself asocial, which paradoxically reassured me, since I could henceforth identify my abnormality as a step towards normality: "*You are invited to a reception; the first thing you spot in the room is... (c) How to quietly leave the room*".

While I waded through rallies, whether public or private, not knowing where to stick, what conspiracy to integrate, under which banner to pass, I never felt that at the Mankind Festival.

As if, in spite of the amplitude of the place and the immensity of the crowd, the diversity in offer\ fragmented this unique space into a multitude of contiguous microcosms, each a comfortable bubble whose wall rolls you in an iridescent shimmer.

My first attendance was in September 1969, Bois de Vincennes.

Perfect for an initiation - not too far from the grandparents, a way to offset my quitting Throne Fair<sup>46</sup>, which I stopped visiting with them when, in 1965, it had migrated from the Place de la Nation to, precisely, this lawn of Reuilly then considered too eccentric. End of the rides for a teenager that did not lack pimples, start of the political stands for a pre-adult who tries to hatch.

I do not remember all details of this first event, but I keep in mind the return at night, on foot, there were no more metros or buses, leading me by a tortuous route to contemplate the Seine from the top of the Pont Neuf which was going to tranship me back to the cocoon of the left bank. Activism is striding...

The other editions each have their stamp.

The International city was my favourite, with the huts of brotherhood especially of liberation movements, each one anxious to water its fraternal hosts. We raised it quite a bit, the revolutionary elbow: rice, cactus, coffee, even grape or hop alcohol, solidarity in all its distillates.

The year when Jan, who freshly fled from Czechoslovakia, had landed with us as his only known addressees when freedom chose him at the time of a

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<sup>45</sup> L'Humanité (Mankind) is the daily paper of the French communist Party. It was founded in the early XXth century by Jean Jaures. Every year, the Party organises a three-days festival under the banner of the paper, attended by hundreds of thousands of visitors.

<sup>46</sup> Throne Fair, la Foire du Trône, was founded in 1957 – it is the oldest and the biggest French fair. It was displaced from Nation Place to neighbouring Vincennes Woods in 1965

congress, agreed to let himself be circumvented, and almost joined the Communist Party.

This other vintage, where alcohol helping, I disappeared with the companion of a comrade - the research carried out by our worried mates flushing out under a tent the drunken collapse of our double hump. The one year where the Plaisance section had obtained from Ernest Pignon<sup>47</sup> the right to reproduce his portrait of Picasso, us activists being charge of selling a few dozen original lithographs whose mere mention of the price already scared off the passer by ...

My last Mankind celebration was in 1977. I had just joined Geneva, where Fasting, an austere four-day celebration, had the good taste to that year coincide in dates.

Professional discretion of international civil servant, last greeting to the comrades before joining the ranks of the stealth proselytes of the Revolution.

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<sup>47</sup> Ernest Pignon Ernest (born 1942) is a famous French painter of the XXth and XXIst Century, a longtime member of the French communist Party

MCMLXXIII  
MAJESTIC

Demonstrating for peace in Vietnam was a constant in my life as a young adult. Strengthened by legitimacy and support from the highest minds, final victory seemed to us a historical necessity, for which only a few signatures were missing.

On January 27, 1973, the representatives of the parties concerned - the American government and its minions in place in Saigon, the North Vietnamese government and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the South formed by the Viet Cong - confirmed our guessing by signing in Paris, at Majestic hotel, armistice agreements for a conflict that never really said its name, although it had been going on since the very beginning of the sixties (reviews generally date it from the presidency of John Kennedy).

On the American side, there was no Vietnam War. Officially, successive American governments have commissioned military advisers to help a friendly regime, that of South Vietnam, to face an insurgent communist movement. Under Kennedy, the " advisers " went from a few hundred to 15,000. With Johnson, who succeeded him, the " advisers " on the spot exceeded 500,000. They died there at the rate of a hundred a week, and the number of seriously wounded returnees was commensurate.

American public opinion was finding it increasingly difficult to accept such an abstruse sinking which was furthermore costly in resources and in destroyed lives. The young men refused conscription, their parents lived in pain or the fear of mourning, the mutilated and bruised veterans made known the hell where a fanatical anti-communist and interventionist policy had plunged them.

Unlike Kennedy and Johnson, Nixon was a Republican, a party whose image is not associated with that of the dove.

It was however on the basis of promises of disengagement from Viet Nam that he campaigned and defeated his Democratic competitor.

Once inducted in January 1969, the new President promoted a " *Vietnamization* " of the conflict, with a rapid withdrawal from engagements on the ground, aerial interventions continuing, logistical aid and training for the South Vietnamese army being reinforced.

France had already attempted this approach without success in 1949 in Indochina, by what was then called the " *yellowing* " of the war.

In short, " *Vietnamization* " experienced the same failure since very quickly American combatants had to intervene again to avoid the collapse of their southern partners, whose troops could not, and perhaps did not wish to, contain the new year offensive of their compatriots from the north and the maquis.

Quickly aware of the impossibility under these conditions to achieve a victory or at least a military *status quo* which would preserve American lives and protect him from a backlash from public opinion, President Nixon gave a mandate to Henry Kissinger to negotiate and to succeed. This was concluded fairly quickly - the choice of Paris for the signing of the agreements being seen as a posthumous tribute to General de Gaulle, who in 1969 pleaded in this direction with Nixon then on an official visit to France.

It took two years for the dice to be all cast. After a last attempt by Nixon's successor *ad interim*, Gerald Ford, to resume bombing - authorization refused by the United States Senate - the South Vietnamese regime capitulated in April 1975 in Saigon, which could become Ville Ho-Chi-Minh.

## XXIV UNFAITHFUL

Where one tackles a delicate turning point in matrimonial reviews, that where the contract begins to be called into question, at least for its part based upon article 212 of the Civil Code " *The spouses owe each other respect, loyalty, help, assistance* " The notion of fidelity very early appeared to us as very relative - I write " *we* " not as a plural of majesty, but as a testimony of a reflection associating both spouses.

Perhaps we owed it to the sparkling sixty-eight who was always happy in the air or to whatever else chemistry making our couple a special entity - the tacit agreement was that fatal infidelity could not be pronounced, if there was the desire to rebuild elsewhere. In short, alternative exploration was more than tolerated - it became part of our living together.

And so it was, honeymoon hardly passed. Monique, in her Defence tower<sup>48</sup>, did not oppose the attempts from one or the other colleague - including the one, she told me almost on the fly, having her squeak a slatted bed base on the edge of the Seine river, during an afternoon at the end of summer 1970. Our marriage was barely three months old.

As for me, I discovered that belonging to a more feminine than computerized administration had good side-effects. I settled into a relational routine that lasted as long as my job there. Curiously, I remain of monogamous tendency even in the extramarital, comfort zone permitting.

We led this doubly parallel life during more than fifteen years. We were scrupulously careful not to overlook another component of this article 212 - mutual respect, which first of all took the form of discretion.

When by chance I invited home, I then hunted to the last hair on the marital duvet. We only knew about elsewhere if it was disclosed, and our years passed in contiguous pleasures. Rarely have we jointly practiced adultery - it is not so simple, not necessarily equally satisfying and fantasy loses flavour when shared.

It is after the Rose wedding<sup>49</sup>, back from Africa, that our tracks differ.

The reason was social - we both calmly grew elder, but my ageing continued to offer those temptations that teem with a job taking you to so many points of the globe. Social status still opened doors that my colonialistically deformed body could not have negotiated.

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<sup>48</sup> La Defense was the new Paris business district, hosting HQ of many international companies.

<sup>49</sup> French language attaches an element to each wedding anniversary. Golden wedding is 50 years, Rose wedding – seventeen.

Monique found herself at home - and in Saint Genis Pouilly, one does not play Belle-de-Jour<sup>50</sup> every other morning. Perhaps she had lost her taste as well, adventure ageusia after so much equator?

She will have lived well, but for less time.

I managed, during a party imagined by our daughters for her last birthday, to have a few of her road milestones join the party. Some could, others not - all had in their eyes or in their voices the immense tenderness that real great lovers know how to bring up.

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<sup>50</sup> Belle-de-Jour – Beauty of the Day – is a famous movie by Lui Bunuel, starring Catherine Deneuve. A suburban housewife she dedicates to prostitution during daytime, both to help her husband with fresh moneys, and to fight her own boredom.

MCMLXXIV  
GRÂNDOLA, VILA MORENA

Thanks to my father, I learned Portuguese. Thanks to my mother, I believed in better days. The collapse of the Salazarist dictatorship could only motivate me. As early as November 1974, Monique and I followed the shatters of the Carnation Revolution.

It was on April 25, 1974 shortly after midnight that the broadcast by a Catholic radio of the song Grândola Vila Morena - Grândola brown city -, prohibited by the regime, had given the expected signal. The members of the Armed Forces Movement, MFA, then embarked on an insurrection which, in a few hours, brought down an absolute power in place since 1926.

These events are commonly called Carnation Revolution, like the flower that citizens gave to the military to show their support for the Movement.

The insurgents had been organizing for a little over a year, united first by their rejection of the colonial wars that drag on in Angola and Mozambique, with no other prospect than the loss in increasing numbers of human lives. They united on a few major objectives forming the basis of their program: democratization, decolonization, economic development.

The management team included senior current dignitaries, and leaders who had recently resigned from prestigious positions. Several would then be selected to key positions in the Civil Government, and their movement will exert a more than considerable influence on the evolution of Portugal, 45 years ago as now.

Unlike other military conspirators, the MFA did not hesitate to hand over power to the people and their representatives. Hardly had dictator Caetano left for exile that political prisoners were released, while the leaders themselves, returning from their own exile, make a triumphal entry into Lisbon, Mario Soares the Socialist on April 29 and Alvaro Cunhal the Communist on the 30th.

The military power could then start to organize the first elections of the new Portugal. However, this was not without difficulties - the MFA having adopted a



resolutely progressive position on the economic and social level together with the Communist Party, sometimes opposing head-on the Socialist Party allied with what remained of forces holding a free-market position, sustained materially as well as ideologically by the social democratic party of West Germany.

The emergence in Southern Europe of a pole of radicalism was seen either with concern or with wild hope by public opinion.

Finally, it is precisely one year after the collapse of dictatorship that elections were held. Revolutionary pressure and enthusiasm had time to subside, and the Constituent Assembly was mostly composed of Social Democrats and Liberals.

The Communist Party wins only 12.5% of the national vote - but this figure is misleading: in the South, the poorest part of the country, it collects more than 30% of the votes on its program of confiscation of land left fallow by the big owners, which was to be handed over to the small peasants.

The influence of the Carnation Revolution remains considerable.

It was while singing Grândola Vila Morena that some Portuguese deputies, in 2013, protested against the austerity policy imposed by the European institutions. Portugal remains today one of the rare countries where a majority from the left, heir to April 25 Revolution, opposes while in power economic free market.

## XXV MILITARY SERVICE

74/12 - this is the official name for the French army contingent where I decided to be incorporated. I could, through leap for diploma, make things drag out until the theoretical end of the deferment, 27 years old. To the extent, however, that I had no ambition for higher level research in a discipline, economics, for which university attendance had more or less convinced me of its inanity, there was no need to procrastinate further. The decision made at the start of the school year not to defer any more therefore translated into a call passed over by military police to join the army in early December for a period of twelve months within a regiment based in Mont Valérien.

It took some effort to locate this peak, and to see with relief that it was in a reasonably close suburb. This allowed Monique to drop me by a cool late autumn morning at the doors for uniform on the way to her laboratory. I felt a little bit cold around ears exposed to the extreme by a neighbourhood hairdresser quite surprised to see such a long hair youngster - I carried on the shoulders - ask for the clipper.

The first month was basic training. Guarded residence in a room with twenty beds. The evenings went on calmly - no one wished to risk losing by misconduct the privilege of an assignment in the Paris region, which I owed to my marital status, others to interpersonal relations and some at random.

In short, I took it easy, creditor of the double prestige of age and of university level - my companions generally just celebrated their eighteenth birthday and were only waiting for the moment to join a still buoyant job market - , but above all of the very precious talent of knowing a little how to sew.

During the week preceding incorporation, my mother had taught me the basics of handling the needle. She knew by hearsay that a soldier's imperative task was to patch up the dangling buttons. So I passed on to whom was asking - there were many! - all the secrets of the eye. In exchange, I was admitted despite my ignorance of the game at the tarot tables, which was later very useful: nothing like a game of cards to hide discomfort in society.

I lived the army conscientiously.

Communist breviary did not fight the military. Besides, I felt at ease in what I was experiencing as a sort of initiation to the collective. From the second fortnight, weekend leave; from the second month, night leave; at the end of the first quarter, no more sleeping arrangements, it was necessary to house

the new residents; very quickly, closet in changing rooms where each morning we took down a uniform brought back to its hanger at five o'clock.

My military service had a very bureaucratic rhythm barely interrupted by infantry bursts.

I had to set up fewer night guards over a year than a medical intern over a month. My rank of corporal was acquired thanks to the benevolence of an officer taking over from my clumsiness for the disassembly and reassembly of a handgun. A week of manoeuvres at the Sissones camp, from which I especially remember a bivouac where I challenged in Marxist strategy officers hardly older than me. A little adrenaline during the clandestine printing and circulating of the all-new military regulations, which were binding on everyone but which it was forbidden to publish...

Anyway - I would have liked to prolong as a non-commissioned reserve officer. But the army, in its wisdom, knew how not to provide for it.

MCMLXXV

## FRANCO IS WHOLLY DEAD

Spain was like a second homeland for me. A homeland where Pétain<sup>51</sup> would never have been fallen. A real disgrace, until, on November 20, 1975, Francisco Franco was declared dead.

The one who had proclaimed himself Caudillo, that is to say the War chief of Spain - a kind of Dux bellorum in Roman times; in Mexico, Zapata was also a caudillo - and readily presented himself as a regent preserving the throne for its legitimate occupant had kept the country on short leash for more than 35 years.

Franco did not become a public figure with the Spanish War. Born in 1892 in a Galician garrison town - on the border with Portugal - he quickly rose through the ranks in the military hierarchy, alternating posts on the peninsula and colonial campaigns in Morocco, to become at 34 years of age a very young general promoted by Primo de Rivera, author in 1923 of a coup legitimized by King Alfonso XIII. Primo de Rivera is indeed satisfied with the role played by Franco in suppressing the desire for independence from the Cherifians.

Primo de Rivera having decided to create anew a military academy in Zaragoza, he appointed Franco to design, create and then direct it. In 1930 the King got rid of Primo de Rivera. The municipal elections of 1931 saw the victory of the Republican camp in the cities and resulted in the dismissal of the King in the hope of allowing in this way for the modernization of the country.

Franco swears allegiance to the new authorities and does not take part in a premature military coup attempt.

His apparent loyalty allowed him to remain in high office until the elections of February 1936 which saw the victory of the Spanish People's Front with the tacit support of the anarchist movement which did not participate in the elections. Previous parliament majorities that governed the Second Republic, the

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<sup>51</sup> Marshall Philippe Pétain was a hero chief commander during WW I, then the head of French "official" Government collaborating with the Nazis during WW II, until his destitution after victory in May 1945. He was sentenced to death at the end of the war. The sentence was not carried out and he died in prison in 1951 at the age of 95.

majority of the center left, in 1931, then that of the right, in 1934 were deemed compatible with militarism and clericalism.

With the Popular Front, the situation changed.

It was therefore on July 17, 1936 that Franco launched an uprising which, after three years of civil war and 1 million dead, led to a dictatorship whose longevity comes as a surprise - since in 1948 already the regime had been condemned by the general assembly of the brand new United Nations as "*the fascist government of Franco imposed by force on the Spanish people*".

The leniency from which Franco benefited is explained by the context of the time. During the actions in Morocco, Franco had forged solid links with the French military, also plagued by struggles for independence. Franco was made an officer in the French legion of honour in 1928. He was promoted to the rank of commander in 1930, French Minister Maginot traveling from Madrid for the occasion. For the British and American conservative governments Franco was an important element in the fight against communism, whose characteristics under the Spanish Popular Front suggested that it could be established in southern Europe.

The caudillo knew how to play with these liaisons and these fears, taking care during the second world war not to alienate the allied sympathies while collaborating with Nazi Germany. After the war, his zeal to support the American hegemony - which built 4 bases in Spain - with in 1959 an official reconciliation visit of President General Eisenhower did the rest: the Franco power was never disowned or endangered by the western alleged democracies.

The death in 1974 of the anarchist Salvador Puig i Antich, the last to be garrotted by the Franco executioner, continues to illustrate a cynical profession of faith: after Hitler, Franco was definitely worth more than the *Frente Popular*.

## XXVI GWENAËL

It is Wednesday, June 11, 1975, mid-afternoon. As a good soldier I am working at my desk in the Central Directorate of Transmissions, performing regulatory routines - when I am asked on the phone. My mother, from Cochin hospital. I am a father, Gwenaël was just born, everything went well, she is red haired...

Monique had entered the clinic the day before - to reach Cochin from Arcueil and the Black Cow area we had escaped the general transport strike by just a few days. The weight of the pregnancy had made us take refuge in the suburbs, leaving behind rue Didot and its six floors without elevator. Respectful of the military order and anxious not to jeopardize the privilege of an assignment in Levallois through desertion in despair I then joined my faction, leaving the future mother in hospital hands and maternal solicitations.

As I know - Soldiers' committees<sup>52</sup> informed - that there are rights attached to a birth, I immediately pass on the news to the officer on duty to know how to have my entitlement recognised.

His plainclothes moustache - only conscripts put on uniforms at headquarters, this is how we are identified -, glass of schoum in hand - he had a fragile or overly stressed liver -, he confirms the 3 days and wonders what I'm still doing there! Dumbfounded a little of this benevolence I get on the bike and force on pedals until I join Gwenaël and her mother.

Conception hadn't been rushed - we had been married for five years, Monique well settled in a professional life brought around through family relationship, I had chosen the secure and social path as a full-time employee and I knew that I would soon join managerial level. When the time came to concretize, we therefore strove for conception. Without much success over the months, to the point that the general practitioner we consulted suggested, to dilute a little no doubt too sticky broths, that we somewhat space out the attempts.

He was probably right, however abstruse the advice seemed. Gwenaël is there, it is a success and a joy. I certainly have some trouble finding my branch in this asserted Celtic fawn blond with cyan pupils - but parenthood is different, it is much more solid than fleeting appearances.

First born, Gwenaël quickly appropriated the intellectual area.

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<sup>52</sup> Soldiers' committees were a kind of clandestine union of French youth called to military orders. The Committees were active from 1973 to 1978 and brought about the recognition of basic civil rights to non-professional soldiers during their military periods.

As soon as she was able to turn pages, always a book in hand - with text scanned seriously, attentively, listening to reading or independently leafing. Affectionate also for the nanny and her gendarme husband who kept her during the day in their barracks, she remained under the military sign of her birth.

It was the suburban start of a brilliant life.

I do not know if Gwenaël will have developed her potential thanks to or despite the family education which was or not imparted to her. The years have now passed, the balance sheet is being built. The girls will have had much merit in building themselves solid despite family bumps, despite sometimes chaotic fatherhood.

For the time being, we are in rue de Javel, another neighbourhood, another nanny - we have migrated from army cap to couscous maker. Gwenaël just turned two. Without stumbling, she deciphers out in a confident voice the plaque affixed at the entrance of the building "DOCTEUR MARIE JACQ, PEDIATRICIAN, FORMER INTERN WITH PARIS HOSPITALS".

She read it, I swear, I swear that she read it!

MCMLXXVI

## THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

I had versatile taste buds, since childhood curiosity had led me to appreciate muscatel wine way too much and too early. Without being a nationalist, it seemed to me as granted that the French vineyard offered such a pallet that nobody could seriously challenge the legitimacy of the *primus inter pares*. But some were pushing from behind ...

On May 24, 1976, two wine merchants, a British and an American, organized in Paris a tasting competition for red and white wines opposing French and Californian products. Apart from the two organizers, the other nine jurors were French. They enjoyed an unassailable reputation as great professionals.

To the surprise of connoisseurs, the Californian wines emerged victorious from the comparison, whether in white (Chardonnay) or in red (Cabernet Sauvignon). The Meursault and other Mouton Rothschilds were defeated by the products of the new world.

The shame falling upon French specialists was such that some judges tried to retrieve their ballots, that other specialists challenged the results by weighting the scores according to various criteria, that resuscitations after 2, 10, 30 years were organized in the hope that French wines would age better than their counterparts across the Atlantic. Nothing worked; California was indeed dominant.

French specialist circles may try to hide or minimize the scope of the event, even discredit it, but this "*Paris judgment*" produced considerable effects. The first effect was obviously a dramatic increase in selling prices for the winners. The second, more subtle, effect was to open the way to questioning situations of domination or exclusive excellence that were believed to be impregnable.

Since Californian wines could be considered superior, other bastilles of taste or know-how could also be taken or at least besieged - often with the goal of



making the brand name of the defeated original fall into the hands of the winning copyist.

There was therefore a flowering of champagnes, camemberts, laguioles<sup>53</sup> – certain personalities even came to lose the use of their surnames, which they had imprudently attached to a brand ceded to financial powers zealous to keep the label authenticating the brand acquired and adapted.

The consequences of the 1976 competition continue to weigh on our vision of the world of taste.

The comparison of the apples from here with the pears from there led to a hierarchy which could only harm the root product. Californian wine supplants the Grand Cru of the Médoc or Beaune, on the grounds that some have accepted, one day, to provide marks to tastes and colours.

Consequently, no classification was illegitimate anymore, even if it reflected a self-proclaimed hierarchy. English is the language of economic domination – it stands out as such in the conclusion of contracts.

By this simple observation, the so-called Shakespeare language becomes credited with the title of the most used language, at the same time it acquires a teaching monopoly, it is transformed by boomerang effect into a common cultural language, thus extending the field of its domination.

This is why your daughter does not speak<sup>54</sup> – it's a bit of the dregs from Paris Judgment that forever remains across French throats.

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<sup>53</sup> Sparkling wines, industrial cheese, foldable knives

<sup>54</sup> "Voilà pourquoi votre fille est muette" – this quotation from Moliere play "The unwilling doctor" – *Le médecin malgré lui* – is used to express the fact that after a long, intricate, not really understandable demonstration, one comes to a conclusion that no one dares to question.

## XXVII

### THE BLACK COW

One speaks about gravidity about a pregnant woman. This qualifier, as unpleasant as it sounds, refers to the difficulties experienced in climbing even a few steps. When Gwenaël announced herself, we had to leave the sixth floor nest of rue Didot. From owners - the studio in the attic was a wedding gift from my mother, as an inheritance in advance - we became tenants again.

Monique made a reasonable living in the laboratory of a multinational, but the generosity of my employer, that granted me as a permanent agent the fifth of my employee salary during military service, did not allow us to settle in beautiful neighbourhoods.

So it was the suburbs - true southern suburbs, indeed close by suburbs, but Arcueil is outside the limits of the Parisian lap. A two-sided feeling, therefore - on the one hand, that of defaulting to the intramural family tradition, on the other hand the satisfaction of reconciling social ideas with practices, joining as a now solidly registered communist, a territory of the most beautiful red.

The Black Cow, this is how the district where we settle is named, we reach it from the center of Paris by a combination of metro and bus.

Not that the trip is long or complicated. But once returned home, you have returned. Nothing in common with the Plaisance district - where the foot of the buildings bathed in a swamp of shops and bars, each resident knowing everyone else, gossiping at leisure leaning at the counter or acting as door-to-door proselyte.

The suburbs, this one at least, is not really potluck. The national motorway #20 may well be called Avenue, its twice four lanes do not encourage spontaneous fraternization. Each in one's home !

Up to political meetings which departed from the warm ceremonial presiding over the assemblies of the Didot unit, which were held at any member's home, provided he or she lived on the ground floor or in a building equipped with an elevator, sometimes we occupied the back room of the bar where we stored the material for the perfect sales of l'Humanité and prepared the glue in buckets for activist collage. Arcueil is a communist, democratic municipality - meetings are therefore held on premises loaned by the town hall, we arrive there on time and do not linger afterwards.

The only human warmth outside the family circle, we found it at the barracks of the gendarmerie, located a stone's throw away. A large complex where

certain wives of non-commissioned officers rounded up salary while guarding under-age children during the day.

Our host family was from the Saumur region, good-natured people, by no means priggish.

Very early, instead of balking between who, Monique or me, would pay the detour at the end of the day to collect the infant, we took the habit of joining all at Fort de Montrouge - this is how it is named despite straddling Arcueil and Bagneux<sup>55</sup> - to swallow a few glasses of wine while discussing in a very relax way about the working class, the proletarian peasants and the revolution which, no doubt, was looming.

Arcueil was also a bus city - especially number 188, which linked us to the Porte d'Orléans. The one on which I extended with my then lover, very platonic love except on rare occasions of marital absence, the office-based glances, laughter and hands clasped endured the jolts of the machine leading her to Bourg-la-Reine.

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<sup>55</sup> Arcueil, Montrouge ("Red Mountain"), Bagneux ("Bathing place"), Ivry, Bourg-la-Reine ("Queen's village") are contiguous cities from the nearby Southern suburbs of Paris. They are crossed by motorway # 20, which starts in Porte d'Orléans – Orleans' Gate, the gate of Paris through which one took the road leading to the city of Orleans.

MCMLXXVII  
BY TOUTATIS!

Another constant for my human development is comics. My father had nothing but contempt for the weekly children magazines. But cartoon albums were something else. Quality had the right to prevail.

And within quality, René Goscinny, who died on November 5, 1977, at the age of 51<sup>56</sup>. This scriptwriter who left us so many imperishable works - from Petit Nicolas to Iznogoud, of course via Astérix - will have greatly contributed to making comics a full-fledged component of French-language literature.

While in other cultures speech bubbles often remain a relatively minor art, inexpensive and considered unworthy to impersonate via a muse, the French-speaking world very early recognized the intrinsic market, aesthetic and intellectual values of this production.

An interesting characteristic of French-language comics is its transnational character.

The creator and first theorist of the genre - Rodolphe Töpffer - was born in Geneva in 1799. Many of the authors and publishers who in the 1960s gave acclaim to comics are Belgian. The mass market, with its festivals and specialized bookstores, is French.

It is not trivial that the emergence of comics as a true independent vector of culture followed closely that of the Nouveau Roman<sup>57</sup> ("New novel"), which translated into the so-called conventional literature a mutation in the relation of the narrator to the reader.

Samuel Beckett, Claude Simon, JMG Le Clézio were distinguished by the Nobel jury. Franquin, Fred,

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<sup>56</sup> Albert Uderzo, the designer, then designer-scriptwriter of Astérix, passed away on March 24, 2020 at the age of 93. It was after the writing of this chapter. It goes without saying that, in the mind of the author of these lines, Uderzo is fully associated with the homage above paid, through his partner and brother in creation René Goscinny, to the whole phylactery community.

<sup>57</sup> The Nouveau Roman is a type of 1950s French *novel* that diverged from classical literary genres. The Nouveau Roman put forward a theory of the novel as focused on objects: the ideal *nouveau roman* would be an individual version and vision of things, subordinating plot and character to the details of the world rather than enlisting the world in their service.

Mézières and so many others were dignified by that of Angoulême, whose deliberations acquired, from the first edition in 1974, considerable importance for the public and for the profession.

A major difference between the New Novel and the comic strip, however, is that the first has lost its visibility - this label is no longer claimed by the authors, even if the technique of distancing remains -, while comics never cease to sparkle, to the point that no one would now think, at least in the French-speaking world, of challenging the privileged place designers and scriptwriters have acquired among audiences of all ages, from all origins and from all backgrounds.

The facial value is obviously not an absolute criterion of quality, nor a marker for the belonging of an object to the artistic domain. It is however important to note that the sales price of a " *French* " comic strip , whose 62 pages are read in a few dozens of minutes, represents at least the double that of a classic novel.

This distinction by value places comics in the rare category of objects that are both exceptional and popular. Unlike classic books, for which the pocket format is tending to dominate a market it has revived, attempts to publish classics of comic books in a less expensive presentation have proved useless if not unsuccessful.

To stick to French-language editions, more than 350 editors are active year after year, producing some 5,000 titles, including a good hundred in more than 50,000 copies.

Tintin, Astérix, Gaston, Corto Maltese, Valérian, Philémon and their successors therefore continue to benefit from the most sophisticated publishing technique, including electronically. French-speaking comics, the most modern of the new arts, obviously still have many brilliant decades ahead.

## XXVIII

### THE WATER FOUNTAIN

Sometimes one becomes callused early. The "*youngest head of branch in France*" I had become, future social security glory, meanwhile part of an entity that is certainly prestigious but without much openings - too high landing on a too narrow area - saw the boredom of uniformity coming.

Admittedly, I wore the suit beautifully, I adorned management meetings with relevant remarks between two cups of bubbles, I led to general satisfaction a solid troop of fifty employees. For sure I had a free housewife and a model child at home, a joyful and beautiful mistress for working days and evening bus rides. Clearly, the Champs Élysées roundabout was circumvented by comforting CGT sections and corporate Party sections - but all of this combined created discomfort. My life, in short, was mapped out, the hardest part of the road already accomplished, my tomorrows would sing the same song for decades and decades, while I had just passed twenty-seven years.

Too early for the age of certainties!

Monique no doubt also found herself worried about being caught into a too predictable environment. She approved my applying for a same grade transfer to manage a health insurance branch located as far away as possible, in Perpignan<sup>58</sup>. A change of scenery going back to basics: tramontane, the North wind, would sweep our heads, salt and sun would tan our skins, Catalan Rs would roll our hearts.

The hierarchy was not indifferent to these inclinations.

It pointed out to me that since *de facto* there was no vacancy since the position was already promised to a deserving, experienced local candidate, my dreams of change could not be quickly satisfied in the national bureaucratic sector.

If I was in a hurry to explore a real elsewhere, it would be better to attempt a more spectacular move. It turned out that my entity was a direct member of an international organisation specialized in social security, where a position opened. It is in Geneva, it is ambitious, it is promising, and it requires certain qualities that are rarer than the mastery of employee skills, fluency in languages other than the mother tongue.

The hopscotch in the dust of Llança, the flirting in Port de la Selva, the talent of my English teachers will not have been in vain: this pedigree allows me

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<sup>58</sup> Perpignan is a city located quite close from the Spanish border, capital city of French Catalunya, at the heart of my grand-father schooling locations where my father, uncle and auntie were born.

to access the final pre-selection. I receive a plane ticket for a day trip to the city of Saussure. Ignorant of local circumstances, of the size of the city, of the amplitude of office hours, I choose an early morning departure and a return towards the evening.

Here I am in Cointrin airport, taxi, Crêt des Morillons as final destination. Formalities are quickly processed, four or five interviews with recruiters whose only concern seems to be to verify that I am friendly with Cervantes and respectful for Shakespeare.

Thank you, we will contact you. Passage by the cashier for a compensation which generosity appals me. It is barely noon when I find myself free on the banks of Geneva Lake. We are in April, great weather, a wind that smells of thaw and the end of winter.

First rib steak with morels of my tasting existence. I then go in search of the Grail: Geneva is said to be host to a water fountain which summit would flood the second floor of the Eiffel Tower. This should be noticed on the horizon!

But nothing that overlooks the harbour. I turn, I return, I buy a map, I try to find my way. No water fountain - there must be a second Geneva hidden at the bend of a hill or a promontory.

A little disappointed to bring back as a souvenir only that of an extraordinarily clean and calm city, I catch a taxi to the return flight. As often, I dare to express my perplexity only when leaving the car - if the question is stupid, I just have to slam the door to hide my crimson from the jeers.

*" No, the fountain has not been dismantled. Today the wind is a little strong, the water would risk flooding the Mont Blanc quay, the city services have not started the pump. You will have to come back to see it work! "*

So it was.

MCMLXXVIII  
AMOCO CADIZ

Geneva saved us from the oil spill. Without a Docteur Poche <sup>59</sup> album, I would have had a hard time understanding the whole drama.

The super tanker Amoco Cadiz, transporting more than 200,000 tonnes of oil to Shell refineries in Rotterdam, ran aground in the English Channel on the night of March 16 to 17, 1978. It broke into reefs near the village of Portsall, located north of the city of Brest. The cargo escaping for a fortnight from the holds of the ship came to pollute 400 km of Brittany coast in an " *oil spill* " considered as one of the worst ecological disasters listed.

It took seven years for the flora and fauna to fully recover. It is in fact a short time, cleaning being greatly facilitated by the extreme mobility of water in the affected region. However, it is estimated that 10,000 birds have died. The calculated damage is around 2.5 billion euros including the time of volunteers mobilized for months.

The sinking of the Amoco Cadiz has singular characteristics: the oil tanker was not a floating ruin, since it had been launched only 4 years before. It was sailing certainly in stormy weather, but the grounding was the result of a long process, since it intervened twelve hours after the blocking of the rudder, a damage that finally led to the loss of the ship and its cargo.

The period preceding the stranding was characterized by the muddling of the American shipowners' representatives in legal and financial quibbles due to the cost and the modalities of intervention of the tugs that were already sailing nearby; by the solidarity of the French tugs, about which we know, given the precise chronology of the facts, that they did not wait for a bureaucratic green light to try to avoid the disaster; and, by the lack of preparedness of the Shell company to intervene in such disasters, since if it does indeed

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<sup>59</sup> Docteur Poche (Pocket Doctor) is a series of French comic publications. In one volume, the hero takes part in the cleaning of Brittany beaches after the Amoco Cadiz oil spill.



have "*lightering vessels*» on site from March 17, those are not equipped with the pumps necessary for the transfer of cargo. The pumps will be shipped from the United States and will arrive after all of the cargo has spilled into the Iroise Sea.

Eleven years earlier, the oil tanker Torre Canyon had caused a first major ecological disaster in the English Channel, after having run aground off Cornwall.

The Amoco Cadiz disaster seems to show that few lessons had been learned. This lack of learning resulted in particular in the use around the Amoco Cadiz of the same chemical dispersants of which, at the time of the Torre Canyon, the great harmfulness, greater than that of the spilled oil, had been emphasized.

The sinking of the Amoco Cadiz was also a great surge of human solidarity, which made it possible to mobilize up to 7,000 people working hard, in particularly difficult conditions, on a hundred sites. They were volunteers and very many farmers whose mobilization lasted several months.

But this sinking is also the relentless denial of responsibility through all possible legal means from polluters guided, as is hardly surprising, by a short-sighted search for corporate profit.

This justifies raising the question of the compatibility between the private ownership of certain major means of production and exchange, with the quest for the promotion and preservation of the common goods, particularly the ecological goods.

The disaster was preventable. It would not have taken place if financial interests had not prevailed over those dictated by common sense.

## XXIX AROUND JURA MOUNTAINS

My professional beginning in Geneva dates very precisely from September 4, 1977. Sunday for the road, from Monday put on a decidedly golden harness since the week begins with the payment in crisp cash of a so-called installation allowance. We had never seen or dreamed of seeing such sums cashed in exchange of nothing, before any work is done.

The week was short. A protestant public holiday over 4 days in Geneva, in La Courneuve Fête de l'Humanité, where we do not boast of Swiss grant, some shame still hangs after each of the zeros. Otherwise, early September is devoted to the installation in a cosy apartment of the border city dear to Voltaire, between Salève and Faucille<sup>60</sup>.

We don't know anyone. Friendships are formed through circumstances, first with the couple - also young - of janitors who had welcomed us. Back to school, neighbours next door, a small nucleus is formed. Monique became a housewife. Her resignation for legitimate reasons allows her privileged access to job offers, but the market although dynamic is not very industrial in the county of Gex - the only proposal that, as a chemist, she had to refuse corresponded to a part-time in a district level high school, almost two hours drive away.

Very quickly, my first mission. A large rally in Madrid, hundreds of delegates, dozens of officials. As the youngest recruit, incorporated when everything was complete and all tasks had been allocated, I have no restrictive assignment.

I wander a bit from room to room, I observe, I arouse the curiosity of an American colleague. The last Iberian day, she asked me to her room for reviewing a documentary item quickly untied with the cord of her dressing gown. I was too surprised to be brilliant. She was probably disappointed but did not hold it against me. The next day, on the plane where we had chosen to seat side by side I was allowed to touch her with the tips of my fingers. I then learn that she is leaving Geneva back to Washington where her forties promise her a bright future. This abandonment saddens me a little - less, however, than the observation that Calvinism<sup>61</sup> is not always austere cheers me up.

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<sup>60</sup> Voltaire, famous French philosopher and writer of the XVIIIth century, used to live at the Geneva border which he could cross on each occasion when French royal police would go after him because of considered inappropriate pamphlets. The village of Ferney subsequently added the name of Voltaire to become Ferney-Voltaire, located in sub-county headed by the small city of Gex. Saleve and Faucille ("sickle") are two mountains surrounding Geneva.

<sup>61</sup> Geneva is often referred to as the city of Calvin. Calvin was a priest from the XVIth century who created a branch of protestant religion in opposition with Catholics he considered as too much prone to leisure and feasts. Hence the reputation of being austere attached to Calvinism.

Back from misdemeanour, I got used to crossing the border morning and evening, taking advantage of good public transport facilities. A bus almost door to door, twenty minutes journey during which one sometimes get acquainted with others just because of each day getting on and off at the same times and same stops. Schedules are precise, country of watchmakers, no one is missing the bus, otherwise it's a half hour wait in the cold that soon descends from the mountains.

It was on the bus that I got in touch again with the Communist Party. On the return bus, it is easy to guess preferences from conversations by my neighbours ... We were at a time when one active voter in four chose the right direction. The network is expanding!

The outward bus is different. A young adult picks it up at the same time, next station, and sees me getting off as she continues on her way. Redhead, green eyes, comely ...

Very quickly she approaches me. British, she is not deterred by fears or modesty prevailing on this side of the Channel. No doubt she feels a little but alone, during the internship of a few months she could secure in another international organization. We cannot say that we were flirting, but not far from it, and it slowly tilted towards the tender. I was going to risk some privacy moves when the end of her contract deprived us from concluding. Crash! Disillusionment and winter coming made me abandon the bus for the car.

The taste for appetite nevertheless remains on my lips. These first months were therefore of recurrent desire, of assumed desire.

We learned, in ancient Greek, that Socrates did not drink, if he was not thirsty, Σωκράτης οὐκ ἔπινεν , εἰ μή διψῶη.

I was very thirsty, and I drank a lot!

## MCMLXXIX FORUM DES HALLES

As a child, during one of our very early departures for the great summer move, my father drove us through Les Halles. This was to pick up cousin Louisette who was to join us on vacation. We slept almost still, but the outside night was singing in the belly of Paris.

Much later, on September 4, 1979, Jacques Chirac, then mayor of Paris, inaugurated the Forum des Halles, a 4-hectare commercial space where some 190 stores were established. The Forum replaced the old central market of Paris whose move to Rungis had been decided almost 20 years earlier, in 1960. It was from 2004 - with more than 40 years of delay - that major works allowed the Forum des Halles, then privatized, to become the most visited shopping center in France, with 50 million customers.

This operation is the most significant that Paris has known since the Haussmannian<sup>62</sup> remodelling under the Second Empire. It is part of a vast renovation and revitalization project in the center of Paris, conceptualized from the beginnings of the Fifth Republic - and having been the subject of a progressive realization over a global period of almost fifty years. The operation was made possible by an upheaval in the capital's food supply mechanisms which, from 1969, left the central district invested for this purpose around the year 1110.

The space freed up was considerable, since it is a total of 14 hectares. We are far however from the ambitions of previous projects which proposed to renovate up to 670 hectares, or more than 6% of the area comprising 5% of the population of inner Paris.

As for the move to Rungis, it was no less colossal, since it involved nearly 20,000 employees working for a thousand wholesalers.

The redevelopment of the Halles district is certainly not the only Parisian urban renewal project. Many other operations of varying scale have been carried out in

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<sup>62</sup> Baron Haussmann was a Minister of Emperor Napoleon the Third who, from 1850 onwards, designed and implemented major restructuring works in the Center of Paris to make avenues more prestigious, and less easy to cut with barricades at times of revolution.

the capital and sometimes its immediate suburbs, to reoccupy spaces made vacant by the departure of production, processing or marketing units. The most important projects concerned the warehouses of Bercy, the La Défense district, the Montparnasse district, up to the so-called Major urban renewal project GPRU of 2001, concerning 7 districts, and its successors.

Paris is neither the only large city in France, nor the only capital to thus proceed with an in depth review of its methods for occupying the soil. Nine Elms' 200-hectare site in London, the complete transformation of very old and dilapidated districts of Beijing - the *hutongs* , a name coming from a Mongolian word meaning "well" - are famous examples of this approach.

The result of these major works is almost invariably the same: a visible and spectacular improvement in living and working conditions in the renovated areas, which goes hand in hand with the forced displacement of the traditional strata of inhabitants from popular strata. The latter have, for lack of a proactive public policy, often not the financial means to continue to reside in the renovated districts, which then fall into the purview of private groups presented as partners of operations in fact often led to their instigation and for their interests.

Urban renewal thus becomes a tool for social segregation ultimately harming its instigators, whose electoral base it dispersed and removed: as is taken, who thought he was taking.

XXX  
MADENN

Madenn could have had an intermediate big brother or big sister; or else, this elder would have taken her place. The accident happened by Easter 78 - a bad conception, bleeding, departure for the hospital and the end of an embryonic story about which we had started to tell around.

Madenn was born at the end of September 1979, the result of events dating from the previous Christmas, which as usual had been Breton and free.

I like this countdown which locates in time the act of love much better than birth. Monique came from Easter flowers, I'm from Pentecost, Gwenaël is the Fête de l'Humanité ...

So. The announcement, the beginnings, the expansion, the Parousia were each the object of a particular, somewhat anxious attention. Premature mourning still carried anxiety.

Madenn seemed to be taking all of her uterine time - what it took to prepare the world, and to choose a name.

As much for Gwenaël the choice was fast - the Catalan first names that I sought to put in the balance did not weigh, for lack of French-speaking euphony, in front of the obvious Celticity -, as much this first name was sought, discussed, evaluated .

Madenn could have been called Ozenn - but Ker as a prefix? Give up!<sup>63</sup> - or Morgane before Renaud - a little too evil. Source of inspiration, the pages of the *ad hoc* dictionary, which had to be produced to the registration clerk to legitimate a choice indeed very exotic in the Geneva region.

Madenn has often been called Madeleine (Magdalena), to which already as a very young child she knew how to respond sharply with the letters of her spelled name flapping in the wind of indignation. She knows how to make herself respected!

No doubt she decided personally on her date and time of coming.

The exercises to hasten the term a little had produced no result. Even the bicycle tours had failed. So we were preparing this Friday evening for a new weekend of vain waiting, the intervention to extract baby from her torpor was scheduled for the coming week.

It was then that she decided to expel herself. Midnight, more than half asleep, just enough hours to clear up the end of weekend alcoholic

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<sup>63</sup> Ozenn is a traditional Britt name. "Ker" in Breton designates the place where one lives. Ker Ozenn the place where Ozenn leaves, sounds like kerosene in French, the fuel for planes. Morgane is a beautiful song by French artists Renaud but is also the name of a "black fairy" in King Arthur's legend (Morgan is the one who announces death).

impregnation. Gwenaël placed in friendly arms on the other side of the corridor, and we go for it. Across the border, across Geneva, another border - for those who were born in France, access to maternity from the country of Gex is done either by cutting or by getting around the Saussurean<sup>64</sup> enclave - Saint Julien en Genevois, here we are.

It's Saturday, it's Saint-Michel<sup>65</sup>, the harvest has been reaped.

This Celticity, Madenn carries it in her character, in her affinities and in her genes. Very early on, systematic prevention applied to these people from the West who are so unused to crossbreeding detects a typical Britton anomaly that early plasters correct in a few months. On her first Christmas, Madenn cheers up the audience with a symphony of hulls hitting each other in giggling laughter.

Brown eyes, matching hair, coquetry at the corner of the lip. My mother will have said it, dogs do not make cats!

Her Chinese name, the one I invented for her, is Ma Dian 妈电 , Electric horse. It suits her delightfully ...

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<sup>64</sup> Horace Benedict de Saussure was a XVIIIth century Swiss scientist famous for being the first to climb the Mont Blanc with a local guide. Geneva is sometimes nicknamed "the city of Saussure".

<sup>65</sup> In France, Saint Michel day, which falls on 29 September, is the date where all yearly rural rents are due to be paid. Contracts for rural lending of land are concluded all on that date, and last for 9 years.

MCMLXXX  
ACADEMICIAN

The press and its major reports quickly led me into history and its inherited novels. I read in one go the *Accursed Kings*, *Destiny of Fire*, Paul Féval and all Théophile Gautier<sup>66</sup>.

When, on March 6, 1980, Marguerite Yourcenar, then almost 77 years old, was the first woman elected to the French Academy, I rejoiced, like any good follower of Hadrian's *Memoirs*.

Born Marguerite Cleenewerck de Crayencour (Yourcenar is, to the nearest C, the anagram of Crayencour), she shares with other great writers known as French two characteristics: she is Belgian, like George Simenon, Amélie Nothomb and many others; she lived mainly in the United States (of which she acquired the nationality in 1947) like once again Simenon, and Saint John Perse, Nobel prize of literature.

But above all, Marguerite Yourcenar is a French-language woman writer, one of the first to enter the notoriety of the general public in 1951 with her circumnavigation bringing together tens of thousands of enthusiasts at the bedside of a Roman emperor over 1,800 years old, telling his life in the first person.

Before Yourcenar, there were other French-language women writers remembered in historical books, from Marie de France to Colette, passing by Mme de la Fayette, George Sand or the Comtesse de Ségur. None, however, had reached the top of the profession.

The recognition by his peers of Marguerite Yourcenar, who from 1971 had been elected member, in a foreign capacity, of the Belgian Academy of French Language and Literature, made it possible to bring into light writers of her generation relegated until then to second rank like Simone de Beauvoir or Marguerite Duras. It opened the way to magnificent vocations, such as

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<sup>66</sup> The *Accursed Kings* (*Les rois maudits*) by Maurice Druon relates the history of French kings whose destiny was affected by the curse pronounced in 1314 by the head of the Order of Temple when sentenced to death and executed by Philippe le Bel. *Destiny of Fire* (*Les Brûlés*) by Zoe Oldenbourg tells the story of the crusade led against the French protestants named Cathares – The Pure People – in the South of France during the first half of the XIIIth century. During the XIXth century Paul Féval wrote a number of novels describing the pre-revolutionary society in France, while Théophile Gautier was a poet and a novelist specialized in heroic stories based in France and Spain.



those of Amélie Nothomb, Marie Darrieusecq, Calixte Belaya, Fred Vargas or that of she who suffered more than she benefited of notoriety, Françoise Sagan.

However beautiful it is to align lists of names each more famous than the others in trendy circles, what permeates the mind of the public as great and having impact for a long future, it is the winners.

In this regard, the masculine continues to crush French literature: out of the 40 Goncourt prizes<sup>67</sup> awarded since the election of Marguerite Yourcenar to the French Academy, only 6 went to women. For the Grand Prize for the novel of the French Academy, precisely, it is a little better, with 10 laureates, without the august company becoming outrageously feminized since in total only 9 female academicians will have been elected, with currently 5 women out of the 35 immortals.

Parity is therefore far from being acquired in literature - as indeed in the vast majority of other societal niches.

The woman artist since Camille Claudel, the sporting woman since Jeannie Longo, the spy woman since Mata Hari, the woman of science since Marie Curie, the criminal woman since Marie Besnard certainly have their hour of glory and recognition, and their place within collective memory.

They only sit there, however, as a testimony to the existence of the other gender - the one to which a few decades ago assemblies of the happy few, still as masculine, recognized, perhaps with regret, certain qualities.

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<sup>67</sup> Since 1903, the Goncourt Prize (named after a famous editor) highlights what is deemed to be the best novel of the year in French language.

XXXI

## SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE

It didn't take me long to realize how homeless the life of an international civil servant is.

Even while staying, we were already traveling, we were still traveling afterwards, preparing for a trip or drawing its *post-mortem*. When the calendar displayed free time, the generosity of payroll and that of the leave days made it possible to travel again and always, to keep the connection with family soil or to discover new ones. Crossing a border four times a day is a training for transhumance!

Me who from childhood tried to inhibit a phobia of the plane I became, though mere habit, a jaded follower of air transport - an addiction of which I continue to savour the oxygenated taste after all these years, scratching my occiput in the manner of the Cosine scientist<sup>68</sup>: if Air France tells me that I have flown 1,400,000 kilometres on its wings over the past ten years, how many times did I travel from Earth to the Moon since 1977?

1977 - 1981, Geneva in first base. Madrid, Strasbourg, London, Jersey, Munich, Manila, Lomé, Casablanca, Moscow, Kiev, Riga, Andorra, Brussels, Luxembourg, Florence, Washington, Helsinki, Nuremberg, Champéry - I list these cities following the order according to which the corresponding anecdotes occur back to me.

I have to reckon that these anecdotes often have a woman's face.

Indeed these four years will have been those of a variety of romantic experiences to which nothing, in my past flirting experiences allowed me to aspire.

I did not keep lists, I did not give notes, I weighed neither advantages nor disadvantages. But I liked to remake the film for myself, at least its end credits. Unwind the partners' roles, tease the senses going through it again, be surprised that it is already so long and so soft.

Certainly, I felt a little as the bees' knees. Among the conquests that I inventoried, few were known in the biblical sense. There were different degrees of interaction, different mysteries in forbidden zones. But finally, in each case, there was attraction, there was transgression. That was enough for me to give the plot a prominent slot in the memories describing my Map of Tendre.

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<sup>68</sup> Scientist Cosine is a caricature drawn by French cartoonist Christophe in the XIXth century ("L'idée fixe du savant Cosinus" – Scientist Cosine's fixed idea).

I was going into my thirties and I finally applied my father's maxim, stated when he was worried about my adolescence honouring too seriously summer love affairs: you have to flutter like a butterfly!

The flowers I was exploring had many flavours. The subtle Belgian, the spicy German, the long-lasting Swiss, the smoky American, the English mint pepper, and for France, a potpourri.

Monique meanwhile sailed in her waters. She was satisfied with the small fry of the neighbourhood, with sometimes, when we were traveling together, discreet fishing outside our territorial waters.

We thus found a reasonable balance which allowed us to effortlessly cross the pitfalls on which many other couples broke their skiff. They are called Moroseness, Frustration, Habit, Expatriation.

The sea was kind to us - we were able to dodge.

MCMLXXXI

## THE ROSE IN THE FIST

After 1968, my political experience had deepened. Together with my comrades I had sold a considerable number of United Left programs<sup>69</sup>, and I was convinced by its updating.

Even if the reserve duty of the international civil servant had kept me away from the electoral campaign, I had the feeling of having thus contributed to the election on May 10, 1981 of François Mitterrand as president of the French Republic .

This election marked more than a classic right-left alternation without much influence on the future of the Nation. Indeed, even if in the first round of the election the left had presented several candidates, the ballot took place against the background of a common program between communists, socialists and left radicals, concluded in 1972 and updated without formal HQs endorsement in 1978.

The rallying in the second round of the Communist Party for the candidacy of François Mitterrand got rid of any ambiguity: the victory would not be neutral for the model of society that France would intend to carry. A sort of panic then caught upon the wealthiest, with a record drop in stock market indices and a multiplication of border controls to thwart the flight of capital.

The legislative elections following by a month the presidential election saw, through the amplifying effect of district polling, the Socialist carve the lion's share with an absolute majority of seats in the Assembly for a little less than 38 % of voices.

Four Communist ministers were called to the Government, and their presence undoubtedly contributed, for the first years of the Mitterrand presidency, to establish a balance sheet with strong social, humanist and internationalist connotation.

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<sup>69</sup> The United Left program was a document common to the Socialist, the Communist and another small left-wing party ("Left Radicals") concluded in 1973. It was sold as a book at over 1 million copies through door to door activism by the French communists. The Programme was updated in 1978 and was at least morally binding upon François Mitterrand as presidential candidate.

Abolition of the death penalty, liberalization of information, increase in social minima, fifth week of paid leave, retirement at age 60, reduction in working time, improvements in access to care and education, increase in the number of public officials, considerable nationalization process of the major means of production and exchange - banking and insurance, arms, electronics, chemicals, pharmaceutical industries -, renewal of cultural policy, aid for international development are all radical markers of government policy, that the right wing and, moreover, a good part of the social democratic establishment have never ceased to fight and undermine in the months and years that will follow.

The undeniable enthusiasm of the politicized popular strata for the coming to power of a left which finally dared to distance itself from traditional policies claiming to reconcile capitalism and social well-being was not enough for the experience to continue for a long time. As the only officials with earlier experience in public management, hierarchs from previous governments like Jacques Delors joined efforts with young go-getters trained in the elitist mould of the "grandes écoles"<sup>70</sup> to hamper the progress of the liberals, who remain for some prisoners of the dominant economic dogmas in Europe then and today alike.

It was the so-called " *rigor* " turning point which, in 1983, marked the ideological and political victory of the supporters of the free-market *status quo* . The future was sacrificed to the European monetary snake and its procession of budgetary discipline measures.

The popular disillusionment was very strong. Despite rare improvements, it continues after decades to maintain the cynical and disillusioned scepticism of a large part of the electorate.

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<sup>70</sup> Dating back from the time of Napoleon the First, French Grandes Ecoles (higher schools) from a system parallel to universities where, upon being successful in competitions specific to each school, presumed elite benefit from a standard high-quality superior education, to after all deliver services allegedly for the public good. There are such schools for public engineers, for the military, for education, for trade and for public administration

## XXXII LIBREVILLE

After spending a few years worrying about sharing the art of properly executing the social policies decided upon at a higher level, I wanted to participate in the development of these policies. For that, it was enough to cross the corridor of a building accommodating in its ninth floor at the same time the execution authority which had accommodated me and that of policy-design to which I aspired.

The step was higher than it had appeared to me. The access to the Geneva elite being very congested, the entry had to be done through a window the jamb of which opened on a residential project in Africa. It involved designing a new form of social protection, a one-year mission to be renewed. The candidates, apparently, did not jostle: mosquitoes of Lake Geneva attracted more than those of the Ogooué river – we are indeed talking about Gabon.

It turns out that this equatorial half-France was no stranger to the family. Cousins very close to Monique were established there as expatriate teachers over the last decade or so with children of ages similar to ours and were enchanted by the experience. Libreville was becoming Breton, so I could only accept the challenge.

We were in early June 1981. I left alone - Gwenaël had to finish the school year - and it was Africa in all its spices.

Gabon was rich, sumptuous, fragrant. I quickly realized that I could not survive alone for long in these whirlwinds of temptations.

Barely three days after I landed, I had already concluded a local coexistence contract with one of the border amazons who made her living with forging nocturnal links.

Whole night, every night of a week, every week of a month: there were numerous, affordable and tempting price variants to soften an equatorial solitude that the WHO recognized, while recommending expatriates to try not to drown it in alcohol before sunset.

In short, it started strong, too strong. I was so afraid of an announced drift that I knew how to convince the rest of my household to anticipate their own migration enough to avoid for mine irreparable outrage.

When I greeted on the tarmac of Léon M'ba airport Monique, Gwenaël and Madenn, stripped of her hulls and starting to walk by herself, she was approaching her two years of age, represented the relief of returning to a sustainable living.

Let there be no mistake. Libations and enjoyment remained very present, but we cultivated them together, within the limits of a family decency under the sharp gaze of the neighbourhood censorship. Libreville by night was just a big village. Everyone knew where the minister's adviser I had become attended on Saturday eve.

Monique was also under the watchful gaze of her peers. Her training as a chemist had opened her the doors of the hospital laboratory, where she rediscovered the pleasures of teamwork, while indulging into the joys of night-owling, at the whim of zouk and reggae imported by the garrison often on the run from Camp de Gaulle.

A little paradise that lasted us five years, with Brent gallon echoes and scents of okoume<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> Gabon is rich of industrial production of oil, precious wood including okoume, magnesium and uranium.

## **MCMLXXXII SABRA AND CHATILA**

At the beginning of the millennium, I was contacted to occupy a prestigious position based in Beirut. I declined - for reasons largely due to events then dating back twenty years.

Lebanon owes to history and its geographical location to count among the population claiming a religious confession hardly more Muslims (55%) than Christians (45%), the latter being distributed between different chapels.

Between September 16 and 18, 1982, thousands of Palestinians refugees in Beirut were shot dead by Lebanese Christian militias called Phalanges, acting at the instigation of the Israeli occupation forces. Their mission was to extract from the Sabra district and the Chatila camp the PLO combatants who could be there.

The Phalanges took pretext of this blank check of the occupier to, once entered the camp, which did not oppose any resistance to them, systematically shoot down all those present. It was then argued that the massacre had been decided in retaliation for the assassination of a Phalangist leader, Bachir Gemayel, perpetrated a few days earlier by an activist also Christian but of Syrian origin, with no apparent connection to the Palestinian people.

This was not the first abuse of the Phalanges, founded in 1936.

Their assassinated leader had established his preponderance in the Lebanese Christian camp through the mass murder of members of the Muslim community in 1975, then out of the armed struggle against rival militias subscribing to the same religious ideology and the execution of their leaders from 1976 onwards. The purpose deliberately made public was to remove obstacles to a separate peace with Israel.

These feats of arms earned Bachir Gemayel the right to be recognized as a legitimate interlocutor by the United States. He was elected president of the Lebanese Republic in 1982 following the Israeli invasion.

The responsibility of Israel as an occupying power was confirmed by an independent commission of inquiry as early as 1982. This responsibility moreover very simply followed from the fourth of the so-called Geneva Conventions of 1949, according to which the occupying power has the obligation to ensure the protection and well-being of civilians.



**Neither the Israeli government nor the Western governments have drawn the necessary conclusions from this finding of presumption of responsibility.**

**It is moreover firmly established that the Israeli governments do not give much practical importance to the Fourth Geneva Convention - yet ratified in December 1949 - including when the said Convention establishes the obligation to protect civilian populations, prohibits collective punishment or the establishment of civilian settlers in the occupied territories.**

**As for the governments allied of Israel, they seemingly accept without great difficulty these constant failures which often impose painful consequences upon the Palestinian populations - as if a tacit exemption from responsibility was recognized to the occupying state by Western powers otherwise usually so quick to elsewhere denounce alleged violations of human rights.**

## XXXIII GLASS

So many anecdotes along the Ogooué or going up the Nkomo<sup>72</sup>!

Our party of four was more than comfortable in the Glass district, on the edge of the Estuary, in the shade of the coconut, papaya and other sea-almond trees which will represent for Madenn until her seventh birthday and a first return to the metropolitan classes the only vegetation with a tangible reality.

As for Gwenaël, she took her classes wearing a uniform, from the so-called mixed school - not because the girls rubbed shoulders with the boys, this was acquired, but because they taught together young expatriates and well-doing natives - until high school Léon Mba, bush cutting chore and parade in honour of the Gabonese Democratic Party.

Days and seasons passed, dry and wet.

We travelled a little, tracks, trans Gabonese train, pirogue, often on outing and equally hosting parties. Our core unit included Inmaculata, who came to work every day, often accompanied by her very young son.

Kiké will attend school only when reaching age for primary. He was therefore impatiently waiting for his almost twin sister to return from kindergarten. Then joined a local cocker spaniel and its cat, two almost domesticated lizards, just enough mosquitoes to justify chloroquine.

The days were simple, with a three-hour meal-nap break; the weeks counted five working days since the reform of the labour code, with a lot of time devoted to seaside weekends or pool brunches.

The economy was operating at full capacity, carried by oil barrels at their best funding an empirical policy of employment and redistribution of wealth - "*the goat grazes where it is attached*" , said the President.

Security was not a concern, and social ties pleasantly offset the gloom of state television. After Bouba, Albator or Candie<sup>73</sup>, we hardly watched TV, so we met. French, German, Canadian, Belgian, Chinese. Rarely Gabonese, except when we went, as guests, to the magnificent residences of senior social security executives which living standards were boosted by the oil rent and its procession of contributing employees.

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<sup>72</sup> Ogooué is the most important river of Gabon, used to float woods to Port Gentil harbor. The Nkomo is a smaller coastal river along Libreville, the capital city.

<sup>73</sup> Bouba (a small bear), Albator (a space pirate) and Candie (an orphan from Swiss Alps) were typical TV cartoon programmes for children.

Monique loved her life as a hospital laboratory assistant. She dominated the subject from the top of her experience, at ease in an environment that was not so different in its isolation from its Defence district experience.

At noon, we listened to the pan-African radio based in Libreville. Monique had become a star of the daily quiz game over the phone. During good months, her earnings through being the first in calling to answer the quiz earned her a local minimum wage in cash.

She took a few lovers, making use of her night guards at the hospital or of my absence on business trips. I did not complain, crisscrossing enough to know how to decorate the outline map of the nine provinces with cities, mosquito nets and evening encounters.

Years could have gone on like this, languid and spicy. Like the boldest French cooperants, I, too, could have exchanged the harness of the United Nations for that, just as golden but probably less robust, of the Gabonese public service.

However, I choose to return to the Geneva mainstream when, at the end of a five-year period, that one was willing to take me back. I had a feeling, in fact, that getting too acclimatized I would be at risk of losing myself.

It was better to come back before tripping ...

## MCMLXXXIII THE COUNTRY OF HONEST MEN

For those who love Africa and have practiced it, there are few heroes dating from the baby boom<sup>74</sup>. Here is the story of one of them.

On August 4, 1983, a procession of popular support supported a rebel garrison from the army of what was still Upper Volta to bring Captain Thomas Sankara to power.

Formerly briefly secretary of state, then minister and prime minister of governments whom he left for political disagreements, and who each endeavoured after degrading him to keep him away from public life, this officer of thirty- seven years became one of the heroes of the continent.

Sankara quickly knew how to choose his ideological camp. After completing university studies, carried out in Cameroon and Madagascar, where he attended the revolution overthrowing the president subservient to the former colonial power, he was appointed commander of a national commando training center from which he founded the Grouping of Upper Volta Communist officers.

Sankara's courageous stances make him an extremely popular figure.

During the 4 years of his government, he accomplished a considerable work both internally and internationally.

Operating expenses were greatly reduced to encourage investment. Effective measures were adopted to get out of food dependence the country which name was changed to Burkina Faso, Country of honest men, with human responsibilities in allowing the desert to advance were combated. Actions were taken to make husbands aware of the sharing of household chores and it was planned to pay part of the salary of male civil servants directly to the wives. The government of Thomas Sankara promoted participatory democracy, facilitated the integration

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<sup>74</sup> In Europe, the "baby boomers" are those borne in the aftermath of WWII, when fertility started to pick up again and kept high levels, i.e. between 1946 and 1964.

of women in political life and attacked the power of traditional leaders.

At the international level, Sankara's policy was in line with the alter-globalist movement.

He refused the " *conditionalities* " of the IMF and the World Bank, denounced the neo-colonial policy of the French government, condemned the support of the United States for Israel and South Africa. He disputed the legitimacy of the debt on the conditions of the rich countries, the service of which further impoverished Third World states.

Sankara was therefore very disturbing for the United States, for France and for other French-speaking African potentates who feared the contagion of his example. This coalition of hostilities culminated on October 15, 1987 in a putsch led by a companion of Sankara, Blaise Compaoré, with the Western powers behind the scenes.

Thomas Sankara is assassinated during the coup. He remains an exemplary figure for African youth, for whom he is often considered the equal of Che Guevara.

The existence of great leaders, bearers of universal progressive values, is one of the characteristics of Africa. There is less talk, however, about those than about the persistent poverty of much of the continent.

Indeed, this poverty made the fortune of many colonizers or neo-colonizers deciding over the agenda of the media, while Lumumba, Sékou Touré, Mandela, Nyerere, N'Krumah and indeed Sankara did not stop denouncing the forces enriching themselves from populations' misery.

## XXXIV THE NINE PROVINCES

The five years in Gabon were rather sedentary. The task that had brought me to Libreville was mainly carried out locally. I had taken a liking, however, to the luxury VIP trips involved in my international assignment and did not hesitate to seize every opportunity offered to jump more or less far out of the family pod.

First there was a provincial journey. A long week on roads, tracks, canoes and tarmacs to discover a little of the rural contrasts of this country I had to advise as best as I could.

I was accompanied for the occasion by a Gabonese executive. We were in the same ages. Whereas he knew even less than I how to resist alcoholic temptations, for extramarital affairs he was however slower.

The rites of his culture required him to verify, by long move into the line of ancestors in the geniture, that the evening mate to be shared with him no strand of the bushy mythology of the Fang people. These checks occupying him until very late at night, I quickly got into the habit of not waiting for his conclusions to shoot with mine: no risk of cosmic interference as far as I was concerned!

This week of travel was that of my Africanization. Even if the antennas of social security spared us rooms, mosquito net and food, it was up to us to transit from one to the other, to design a program for the visits, to collect and to summarize information as uneasy to access as a wine spathe from above.

Bright, spicy, new.

From the catfish refusing to die suffocated, jumping out of its pouch to jump across the cabin hours after being fished, until the elephant determined to compete on the Tchibanga track with the Air Gabon Fokker, who had to repeat two passages before winning.

Kango, Mouila, N'dende, Franceville, Moanda, Mounana... and this head of the bush station asking me considering my boarding pass if I was from the family of the lady from Libreville who answered so well and so often game questions on the radio. Monique had gained national fame while I was traveling.

A second week of circuit was planned to complete the trip. Four provinces were still missing from our tour of Gabon. Works in the capital city did not allow it to happen: the President wanted a law well done but quickly made, priority to the Libreville consultations.

It was therefore in a piecemeal manner that I completed my regional visits.

Port Gentil, economic capital accessible only by sea or by air, where I accompanied the social security doctor to make his visits to the islands at the commands of a Cessna plane. Lastourville, joined by private jet with a journalist from Jeune Afrique magazine for whom I had, as a good black writer, to write an apology for the Gabonese miracle. Minvoul, Bitam, Mitzi, the coffee, cocoa and rubber oases in the great Woleu Ntem forest. Lambaréné in the footsteps of the pelicans, is Protestant missions still haunted by Doctor Schweitzer<sup>75</sup>, crossing the equator with his slew of mosquitoes and his levogyre siphons.

My Gabonese adventures could have ended prematurely.

An organisation naming itself African anti-communist Alliance had the wonderful idea to report my affinities through a pamphlet handed over to the President, who instructed his minister to clarify this with me.

My warmest thanks to the whistle-blower: this denunciation, I carry it with me as a decoration!

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<sup>75</sup> Albert Schweitzer was a French doctor famous for settling in the early XXth century in the forest at the juncture of river Ogooué, close to the city of Lambaréné, where he founded a hospital for treating local people and a protestant school to educate their sons. Dr Schweitzer won the Peace Nobel prize in 1952. He stayed in Lambaréné until his death in 1965. His role in Gabon is now controversial, since he supported the colonial power including in its worst phases of human exploitation.

## MCMLXXXIV PLATINI

As a tradition, United Nations in Gabon used to celebrate the start of the dry season and that of summer holidays with a reception at the home of the Great Smurf. In 1984, the residence was riddled with screens, so that on June 27 no host be deprived of a historic event, the announced victory in the European championship of the French football team acquired before its audience by Michel Platini.

It was their first international title in a discipline that was remarkably popular.

The only prestigious success of the French team in modern international competitions went back to third place in 1958, during the World Cup. The heroes of the time were called Jonquet, Piantoni, Kopa, Fontaine. Michel Platini became their equal in the popular pantheon, having, like Just Fontaine, been recognized as the top scorer of a tournament, better still, a tournament won.

The official creation of the French football team dates back to 1904, as part of the establishment of an international federation. France had previously participated in international football competitions, notably winning a silver medal at the Paris Olympics in 1900.

This precociousness in the construction of an international structure testifies to the vocation of football to become, at the global level, a sport involving very many followers, practitioners or supporters.

Ball games have been legion since antiquity. They permeate a large number of cultures, among the Aztecs as among the Chinese.

The direct ancestor of football, the soule, was already a competition between rival teams. The soule was played from the 12th century on the British Isles and in the northwest of France. Sometimes prohibited because it was too violent or likely to create or aggravate lasting antagonisms between social groups, the soule



remained popular anyway where it had been established. It was often considered by rulers and aristocracies as an activity reserved for people of low extraction.

The soule had however penetrated the great British private schools since the XVIth century. These were the ones who, in the 1850s, took the initiative to unify the rules of the game, hitherto at the discretion of each sports pole, to allow for the development of exchanges and the establishment of championships as they already existed in cricket or in tennis.

The fact that soccer - in English, the word football actually designates the ball - is the result of an encounter between a popular passion and an educational commitment has undoubtedly contributed to making this sport the most widespread in the world, one which has great material and human resources and which most mobilizes the interest of the populations.

Soccer quickly spread outside of the UK. It has spread through university exchanges, through the example of workers hired abroad on major works, or, as in France, through mimicry from a traditional game.

Founded in Paris in 1904, the Fédération internationale de Football Association FIFA did not spontaneously receive the blessing of British institutional practitioners, reluctant to get out of the insularity. Those however will soon join in a movement that had become irresistible, but the acronym of the Federation will remain based on the French language.

FIFA now has more than 220 members, compared to 193 for the UN.

XXXV  
BRAZZAVILLE

Libreville is not very big, and we quickly explored the banks of all the backwaters. Suffice to say that I appreciated the possibility offered by Headquarters to take part in a French-speaking Pan-African meeting held in the neighbouring Congo.

The first challenge was to arrange the trip. The countries may be bordering, and their presidents be in-laws, there was no direct link. Through relations, those of the Minister, not mine, I took advantage of a technical stopover - freight carriage by Cameroon Airlines - to introduce myself surreptitiously or almost aboard the Douala – Brazzaville flight.

Previously, I had been laughed in the face by the Ambassador of Congo when asking him for a visa. Member of *Françafrique*, I was free to move as I wished in the former colonies, without the United Nations pass adding anything to my prestige.

In Congo, the big game. Welcome by a musical group of sprawling women chanting the glory of distinguished hosts, exclusive availability of the Mercedes with driver registered "PR 4" - Presidency of the Republic. I was only a member of delegation without very high rank, but Sassou<sup>76</sup> is not Sankara, and the episode of the plane hitchhiking orchestrated in the name of the brother-in-law must have impressed.

First day, festive descent of the river on a ferry boat with orchestra, drinks and petit fours. I had since the Selva lost the habit of jiggling. I therefore remained as observer of the general swaying. My Saharan clothing shows that I am used to the latitudes, which emboldens a hostess to approach me to offer services which I would only have to praise.

From then on, the Geneva colleagues hardly noticed me outside the work sessions, where my capacities as a young old man of African social rurality were appreciated.

I spent my time following and accompanying the one whose name I did not know. A faded polaroid from a cookie jar reminds me that she was, that her teeth were ivory, and her texture was amber. Not demanding anyway. The gift intended to seal our alliance over the five days of the seminar went in elongating braids that she exhibited to me, radiant, from our first day after.

My Mercedes has thanks to her pointed its hood in places unusual for this type of vehicle. The driver had no questions, the onlookers of Poto Poto

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<sup>76</sup> Denis Sassou Nguesso, long time president of the Republic of Congo, had married a sister from Omar Bongo, president of the Republic of Gabon. Both presidents were from the same tribal group occupying the Bateke Plateau, which the French colonization split over two countries.

were drooling hat circles and my grace was laughing, braided in the wind, returning to her hut.

I brought back three memories of my stay in Brazzaville.

That of this radiant hair, a chess game bitterly negotiated night after night with the hawker who squatted the hotel lobby, and my first STD, treated in Libreville by the Quebec male doctor who had kindly taken care of Monique's evenings the days of my absence.

Small and simple, the world of our time!

MCMLXXXV

## A HANDFUL OF KIWIS

Even the most solid sometimes stumble. François Mitterrand suffered from this immanent rule when, on July 10, 1985, in Auckland harbour (New Zealand) French secret service agents detonated the Rainbow Warrior, a ship of the ecological organization Green Peace.

The operation left one dead; a photographer who had come back to the ship to recover his equipment after a first evacuation. The purpose of the sabotage operation was to prevent any interference with nuclear tests being prepared by France in its Pacific territories.

Two members of the French commando were identified, arrested on the spot and sentenced. Their surrender to French justice, following a UN arbitration accepted by both parties, will give rise to intense negotiations, including on the commercial side of future trade relations between New Zealand, France and Europe. President Mitterrand and his Minister of Defence, Charles Hernu - who will lose his post there - are the acknowledged sponsors of the operation.

The Rainbow Warrior affair is directly linked to the ambiguous policy led by the five officially nuclear-armed powers, parties to the non - proliferation treaty and permanent members of the United Nations Security Council - United States , Russia , United Kingdom , France , China.

According to official statements, the world has known since the end of the Second World War an unprecedentedly long period of non-belligerency between great powers. Since the accession of China to the nuclear status - first test claimed successful in 1964 - what is called the balance of terror indeed seems to work between states which have not known any more episode of direct confrontation.

However, an impressive number of regional conflicts by third parties involved succeeded direct confrontations of universal scope. The five countries concerned intervene directly or indirectly in these local wars,

with or without the approval of the competent international organizations, in one camp or the other.

There are around 50 ongoing armed conflicts around the world, some of which began decades ago. The nuclear powers always play a role therein, often in opposition to each other.

As for the conflicts considered to be ended, there have been several hundred since the end of the Second World War. The disappearance of the Soviet Union did nothing to calm the game, since nearly a hundred conflicts were started after 1989, of which forty are still in progress.

If we add as a risk factor the fact that, in addition to those party to the non-proliferation treaty, several more countries master nuclear weapons - India, Pakistan, North Korea, Israel - we see, to repeat the words from the United Nations Disarmament official in 2018, that *" The risk of intentional or accidental use of nuclear weapons is increasing. (...) The geopolitical environment is deteriorating. Speeches on the necessity and usefulness of nuclear weapons are increasing. Many consider that the modernization programs launched by the States [which have them] are leading to a new qualitative arms race .- "*

The Peace Movement created in France in 1948 by organizations from the Resistance therefore continues, in such dangerous circumstances, to be called upon to play a key role within pacifist organizations.

The new international campaign for the abolition of nuclear weapons, ICAN, launched in 2007, has therefore lost none of its worrying topicality.

XXXVI  
LUSAKA

Gabonese social security had all the less reason to be mean in transport tickets that, by a formal-informal agreement, the Air Gabon company could pay part of its contributions in open tickets, thus alleviating the burden on the company's cash flow. And Air Gabon was not only flying to Mounana or Franceville! By the interplay of alliances between airlines, "*compensation*", as they used to call it, opened up the roads of heaven all around the globe.

This is how I found myself endowed at the beginning of 1985 with a business class return ticket allowing me to reach via Paris Lusaka then Antananarivo before leaving again dashing from Libreville to Mexico City. All this to allow the representation of my parent company in a series of meetings of one of these subsidiaries, the one that welcomed me in 1977 and, not resentful of my desertion, had solicited my African insights for the benefit of its members.

Lusaka is a giant compared to Libreville. To be fair, I hardly kept any memories of it other than that of the hotel where, at the end of the cocktail drinks, I was the subject of a curious bargain between a local executive and a colleague from Geneva whose curves inspired my occasional nocturnal pollution.

The draw was favourable to the visiting team. It granted us, between champagne and gin fizz, a pilfered night in heaven with legs in the air. The next day, me and my ancient new lover each left for our pole, Swiss or Malagasy. We never sat back at the table. It was however very accomplice and very cosy...

Madagascar, which I reached after two days of transhumance, was for me a great moment of discovery.

The duration lent itself to it. The course where I officiated lasted almost two weeks. Circumstances also helped; my status earned me accommodation in town, with, to join the training center where trainees were confined, provision of a car and a driver whose dedication and discretion smile at my memory.

She could then circumvent me, the one whose simple and beautiful merry lady who, glanced at in Libreville, would have attracted my eye and even hour if openly desiring a locally married woman had not been a source of reprisals or even deadly short illness in our village of Glass.

I fell from my branch when she opened to me. Undressed in three gestures and slipped between my sheets without my even taking any part in it. Her

presence in my hotel suite, I owed it to the phone call she wished to make to inquire about news from the country. While she was talking, I had drawn myself in a corner out of a discretion that allowed her audacity.

Mélanie - one of the sweet slices of the tenderness cake. Our evenings in the City of a Thousand<sup>77</sup> moulded the basis. We continued to cast the play without ever being caught, beginners luck, hosted at night by friendly carpets in enclosed offices.

I saw Mélanie during a rebound, a short mission to Libreville some ten years after our goodbye. In all honour - I had just invited her to a souvenir lunch.

It was after the dessert was served that we wanted to visit our table once more. Our advancement in age and my reclaimed local anonymity allowed for audacity that we could not access beforehand. My hotel room is our afternoon receptacle.

Melanie's smile, her lip biting when my tongue specifies - we loved each other on the day of Re-ndama.

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<sup>77</sup> The name Antananarivo of Madagascar capital city means in local language the "city of one thousand" since a former king asked 1000 soldiers to remain there when deciding to establish a garrison over there in 1610.

MCMLXXXVI

## GLASNOST, AND PERESTROIKA

The USSR that I had admired on an official trip in 1978 was struggling to recover from the Brezhnevian stench. In Geneva, my Soviet colleagues sometimes looked grim, trying nonetheless to make me believe in the renewal that Mikhail Gorbachev had come to embody.

On March 6, 1986, the 27<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union consecrated the renewal of more than 40% of the cadres, confirming the hold on the orientations of the country of the one who had been its Secretary General for a year already.

The coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev did not correspond to a concerted strategy of the CPSU. Indeed, to meet the need for reform felt at all levels of a society stuck in too many years in power of an aged and sick Leonid Brezhnev, the Central Committee had chosen Youri Andropov, considered as a potential refounder of the Soviet power. Andropov died after only seven months, without the Central Committee following his advice to designate Gorbachev as his successor. It will take the interim of Chernenko, who will spend practically his leadership year in the hospital, before Mikhail Gorbachev may begin to put in place the reformist directions known as *Glasnost* - transparency - and *Perestroika* - restructuring.

These inclinations for change, however, arrived too late, in a Soviet Union deeply affected by the mistakes of the late 1970s and early 1980s. At that time, Leonid Brezhnev, in power since 1964, was already weakened by illness. The result was an incessant struggle between those close to his first circle, de facto leaders, to preserve their respective shares of power and privileges without collective legitimacy - the " *nomenklatura* " -, to the detriment of the attention which the country should have received.

The growing drain for the military from national spending contributed to economic stagnation.

A report commissioned by Andropov, then head of the KGB, showed at the end of the 1970s that the calculation of Soviet GDP according to Western methods - in value,



not in volume - placed the national economy at a disadvantage vis-à-vis not only the United States, but also Japan and West Germany. The dreams of universal economic and social well-being that the Soviet Union had been able to carry so well since the early sixties was over.

The predominance of military spending and the economic weight of external interventions affected the well-being of populations, victims of recurrent shortages in certain areas or sectors poorly supervised or poorly used, with the emergence of a black market and parallel markets creating or strengthening privileged castes. The Soviet people then lost confidence in a Party whose leaders appeared to have little concern for applying communist principles for the good of all.

The reforms attempted by Mikhail Gorbachev and his team were insufficient to halt this decay, and the Soviet Union was declared dissolved in 1991.

Stalinism had combated the Trotskyist temptation to export the revolution to other countries at all costs. Paradoxically, it seems that one of the major reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union was precisely these attempts to impose its presence on all fronts outside, with an intensity that no longer enabled it to honour the contract of peace and economic and social progress for all, founding thesis of the Revolution.

## XXXVII OAXTEPEC

Barely recovered from Antananarivo - Mélanie had granted to herself a relaxing stopover far from husbands and children, a few days in Paris where she had family and old habits - I take my pilgrim plane to Mexico where I have to introduce on a forum the Gabonese experience of social protection for vulnerable groups.

There is no direct flight between Léon-Mba and Benito-Juarez. Obligatory overnight stopover in Paris - the outward journey to prepare for the trip, the return to recover from it.

The meeting was held in Oaxtepec, already an aquatic leisure center in pre-Columbian times. A few days before the start of the meeting, I reach Mexico City to get used - to the altitude, to the climate, to the time lag, to the Hispanic spirit which comes back to me in big sentences and mariachi trumpets.

My first stay in Latin America, like a dazzle. This great clarity which blinds so strongly, how can it be that I did not discern it earlier?

Everything comes as a shock. The vibrant instruments, the flowers navigating around the Aztec heart of the city, the pyramids that can be reached by metro, the cathedral with the black virgin, the frescoes by Diego Rivera, the taxi driver doctor by day and this blonde with blue eyes, surname Lopez, Moctezuma in matrilineal...

I had my share of success during the few days of the meeting. A still young white man representing the most central Africa thousands of kilometres from his base, using a Spanish language so chastised that in the country of Zapata it is called peninsular, that was intriguing. Some incongruities of Gabonese customs have sometimes cooled my hosts, though - like this insistence on regularly registering a bottle of whisky on the shopping list - the meeting center being as sumptuous as isolated, the happy few among us who spoke Spanish had found the line for daily ordering -, or this curious obsession with inquiring about the rates and terms of a caring and nocturnal company. I was quickly made to understand that these customs had no place in the land of the quetzal.

"*The pride of the Inca*" I said to myself to ignore the aloofness of my hosts confronted with imported barbarism. I therefore remained at a distant admiration stage. A fascinated report from the colonial to the civilizer, a successful integration, the one that made me half a Bantu, leaving little hope of raising myself up to the ankles of the people of the sun.

I found consolation with the mini delegation from Cameroon. Between neighbours, no offense if one skidding causes the other to slip.

On my return, I find Mélanie in Paris, for one evening, one night. But with her, no escapades to follow when in Libreville. I would not have dared such misconduct: I owe her respect.

Each Gabonese evening, we exchange vows of cautious chastity in the darkness of an office. Promising to remain quiet, I can touch her elbow. Then, as minutes pass, we gain confidence, to finally share our juices and enthusiasm.

Planned modesty lasted for a quarter of an hour. A restraint so quickly thrown overboard was a little hypocrite. But such was the protocol.

Mélanie the impeccable could not entirely abandon the codes of conjugal orthodoxy. She needed an airlock to cross the barrier. And I, who loved her even more than I desired her, I held her hand to step over the fence.

The comfort of charity shows from home. I had the opportunity, during trips to Canada, to attend on local channels this type of staging. One feels rewarded to be carried away by the charitable wave - and I would have contributed if it had not been for the international powerlessness of credit cards at the time.

The first " TV telethon" for France was organized on December 4 and 5, 1987. This concept of pledges made by telephone (number 3637) for the benefit of a cause for which the action of the public authorities would be insufficient ( in this case scientific research on myopathy) was directly imported from the United States, where it worked since practically the generalization of television at home in the 1950s.

Was it relevant to adopt this approach in France, a country where, unlike what happens in the USA, social protection is very developed and deemed to be effective? In fact, a first proposal for a Telethon, made in early 1980 by Dorothee, the popular presenter for youth programmes, had not been retained by the management of the channel where she worked, on the grounds that this project was not suitable to the national mentality taking into account the role devolved by public opinion to public power.

It was therefore under a socialist president, who could not be suspected of wanting to sell off social protection in favour of a charitable approach, that the first edition of the French telethon took place. The aim was to work for a cause little known at the time, myopathy, under the leadership of the association directly concerned and with the political support of a large sponsorship organization, the Lions Club.

The proposal won the favour of the audience, since the pledges made during this first edition greatly exceeded the most optimistic expectations. The television counter was capped at 99,999,999 francs, but more than 181,000,000 francs of commitments were recorded.

Since then, the telethon has been renewed every year at the beginning of December, for the same cause and in the same format. The success cannot be denied, as much for the promises as for the donations actually made, the latter being generally higher than the former (in 2018, 69 million euros of promises, 86 million actual donations).

There is something unreal about this persistence in generosity. In fact, despite the hype surrounding it, it only mobilizes a small part of the population - 1 million donors out of 30 million French households - for amounts that ultimately have little significance in terms of budgets for scientific research (1.4 per thousand) or social protection (1.8 per ten thousand), for actions which effectiveness remains to be demonstrated.

In spite of all that, the Telethon has become over the years a leading television and social institution, giving rise to great popular mobilizations throughout the territory, both in rural areas and in cities. The cost of collecting donations is also high, since the production of the program alone represents nearly 15% of the pledges, which is not particularly effective.

The criticisms formulated with regard to the Telethon do not however generally relate to the formula - the State mobilizes voluntary taxation to compensate for its own deficiencies which it thus readily acknowledges and assumes - but on its object - myopathy would not be the best target, and research not the area to focus on.

This operation, by the consensus which surrounds it, will anyway have contributed to promoting the idea that private initiative could legitimately replace the welfare state. According to this scheme, modelled on the charitable tradition of the bourgeoisie, it is up to the donors to choose the beneficiaries of their support, without much relation to the values of solidarity and fraternity which are supposed to be those of the Republic.

## XXXVIII RETURN TO GENEVA

Best dreams always come to an end.

The return from Gabon was a confrontation with other realities. It was in fact a return to a base which had evolved at its own pace, of which our respective maturation processes had not been aware.

Girls who plunged into another school bath, tower accommodation with no coconut palm in sight or Estuary salt on the lips, acquaintances for many dispersed and a Party in disarray. Plus the weight of five years, not so much the calendar as the physical weight generated by an unrestrained colonial regime, the return to Geneva was not idyllic.

Certainly, everything seemed to be fine.

I had taken off. Monique was knitting activities to compensate for the sudden breakdown of professional ties. She sang in a choir, helped vulnerable children with their home-work, reinvested Russian as a prescience of a venue to be. There were also a few faithful friends, with whom we spent evenings that were less crazy than before Africa, but still very pleasant. In short, Europe as an old continent offered us its routine and one gentrified.

The Gabonese windfall also allowed us to see bigger and better in terms of leisure.

We could remodel and extend it without gnawing the small house acquired in Kermorvan, birth village for Monique, and for me happy obligatory stopover for annual vacations. The walls, the lawns, the plantations grew and embellished under the custody of a, finally young retired caring and expert stepfather.

Politics no longer being about future paradises, I turned to the union. This volte was practiced quite successfully, since ten years of seniority had allowed me to weave some links where to find other companions unclaimed the Revolution.

When I ran for the first time in internal elections, the quasi-certainty of my success worried the cacique of the time.

To tell the truth there were hardly more candidates than seats. The international civil servant is not often a convinced practitioner of selfless commitment. The outgoing president summoned me to his quarters to inquire about my intentions. Was I going, as an impetuous communist, to set fire to a shrivelled instance or, cautious avant-garde, to accompany a slow waltz which tempo I would only accelerate at a languid rhythm?

My answers seemed to satisfy my inquisitor, since I found myself sitting on the governing body without even having to make the effort to require access. I owe it to his memory to remember here that this cacique and I quickly became best friends and best accomplices.

In short everything was to make me as happy as a clam.

But so much for lapping. The tub where I frolic is decidedly too narrow, water is soon to overflow. I was starting to get bored with ease.

MCMLXXXVIII

NON-TRANSFERABLE AND NON-SEIZEABLE

Curious show in the center of Brennilis. Under the leadership of the first deputy Mayor, my father-in-law, a troop of a few semi-tramps contemplates the shovels and picks with which they go to pluck the grass from the ditches to access a brand-new public benefit.

On 1<sup>st</sup> December 1988 the 88-1088 Act establishes minimum insertion income – French acronym RMI. This provision, originally intended to keep people in great poverty with a link to the working world, confirmed France's pioneering role in the social field. There were hardly any countries with such a system established at the national level, the rare known experiments being regional pilots, including in France.

Promulgated at the start of François Mitterrand's second seven-year term, the RMI proposed by Prime Minister Michel Rocard was voted almost unanimously by the National Assembly (only 3 votes against and 24 abstentions). It immediately benefited several hundred thousand people, officially residing on the national territory, aged (with rare exceptions) at least 25 years old, neither students nor interns and whose resources were lower than the threshold. At cruising speed, the RMI counted some 1,200,000 beneficiaries each year, most of them living alone and without children, with parity between men and women, essentially young workers or students recently graduated in search of employment.

The RMI was a differential allowance intended to bring the resources of a household to a level considered as the subsistence minimum. His maximum monthly amount – that received by an absolutely destitute family, which due to the generalization of family benefits including housing allowance was a fictitious assumption – was (January 2009, last year of the "*original RMI*") 455 euros for a single person and 955 euros for a couple with 2 children. This placed the absolute poverty line at 1/3 and 3/4 of the minimum wage, respectively.

Being a beneficiary of the RMI attracted entitlement to health coverage and to a certain number of fringe



benefits - including in the field of transport and communication.

In return, the beneficiaries had to subscribe to an integration or reintegration contract, which in rural communities often resulted in the performance of works of general interest benefitting the municipality. They also had to carry out certain administrative formalities linked in particular to quarterly declarations of resources.

Over the years, the RMI, which started under local authority initiative for its integration and control components, became an unconditional social cash benefit, of which the component against exclusion was eroded as implementation practice moved away from the local administrative level.

The RMI was replaced in 2009 by a device called Active solidarity income - RSA - considered as a family benefit used to supplement certain unemployment benefits. The RSA benefits 2,500,000 people. It was essentially charged to the districts' budget instead of national solidarity, without however the responsibility for its implementation being transferred back to the institutions required to finance it.

Over twenty years, what initially represented an effort by the entire community to be home again to those whom the vagaries of existence had left off the path to social progress had thus become just one more tool in an employment policy aiming to be proactive and multifaceted, but having provided no proof of its effectiveness.

## XXXIX CAPERCAILLIE

All in all, life in Saint-Genis Pouilly was not unpleasant. The name reminded me of Catalonia, Saint-Genis Fountain, halfway along the Spanish route and the ancient mosquito traps of Argelès. The hagiography has retained practically nothing from Genis, Genix or Genest the Comedian, but his name is perpetuated in toponymy. There are Saint-Genis almost everywhere in France, the one adjoining Pouilly reflecting well the nature of the character - discreet.

The town does not rustle internationally like the border city of Voltaire which welcomed us and will host us. There is a life here that benefits civil servants but does not depend on them.

Countryside a couple of doors away. Farms not yet converted into manor houses, forest-cutting areas on the slopes of Jura with so many roads or mountain tracks. A weekly market where there are hardly more customers than merchants. A marching band of which Gwenaël is a part with her clarinet, a communal festival dedicated to the capercaillie, an almost mythical altitude bird. Carrousel rides where Madenn turns laughingly, champion of the pompom catching. Homework assistants and public enumerators to whom Monique joins.

The distance from Ferney makes it possible to escape Geneva's grip more quickly. The valley which runs under our windows attracts towards less vinous, more step-sided horizons, with the scents of Christmas tree and raw milk. We discover the valleys, Bellegarde, cheese farms and early frost.

Me and my quintal wander around with nonchalance, indolence of deformity.

The accumulated pounds make cross-country skiing difficult for me, and cycling becomes an impossible exploit. Far from climbing the passes as in the past, I carefully study the contour lines to make sure of the flatness of the ten kilometres that I sometimes allow myself.

I only go through the countryside on beaten tracks. The tennis court at the foot of our building is far too large for strides that I can no longer run around.

Even on holidays, gravity dominates. My role in helping in plantings the now-retired father-in-law, a mason who has become the peasant he wished he never stopped to be, is to hop on wooden boards covering the freshly drawn furrows, in order to widen and deepen them by effect of mass and weight.

Bacon attracts bacon.

I am aware of it, I hesitate to show off on the banks of Lake Geneva. I choose loose clothes with vertical stripes. It is only between the remunerative walls of the office that I uninhibit myself. The international civil servant is neither particularly slender, nor particularly concerned with morphology. In this basket of crabs, interpersonal skills, understanding, ingenuity count more than slenderness, fitness and flexibility that is not bowing.

I therefore stretch with pleasure my working periods. The three in-house cafeterias offer timetables and drinks that host quiet conversation. My lunch breaks are getting longer. I easily form diverse prandial partnerships, even if a few rebuffs sometimes bring me back to the reality of a silhouette that has become very difficult to embrace.

Two years have passed. The time for my union re-election comes. A kind reputation earns me a surge in votes. An almost chief cacique seat is now promised to me. But I don't want this to cut me off from this international social security where I enjoy frolicking so much.

MCMLXXXIX  
TIAN AN MEN

China had become my cup of tea. My interest for this country dated back from high school, was invigorated in Gabon. True put aside since then, but I felt that one day the thread would be renewed.

In the meantime, there would be jolts, and not small ones, on the Orient red side.

Mainly from students, demonstrations took place between April 15 and June 4, 1989 in the central place of Beijing, Tiananmen Square. Similar demonstrations had taken place on several occasions since the early 1980s. The country, which had emerged from the cultural revolution in the mid-1970s, had been driving since the "*Four Modernizations*" - industry, agriculture, technology, defence - under the direction of Deng Xiaoping.

This policy of economic opening met with criticism on two fronts, that of the "*conservatives*" who feared that it would result in an ideological weakening and a renunciation to revolutionary principles as well as to the social gains of new China, and that of the "*liberals*" who aspired to deepen reforms towards more transparency and fighting against the privileges of bureaucratic elites.

The 1989 student movement took shape during the funeral of a leader who had been dismissed for not having known or not wanted to prevent a similar movement from developing in 1987. The man was popular because of his commitment to reforms, and protesters demanded his political rehabilitation.

The movement takes place in Tiananmen Square, occupied on the evening of April 21 by tens of thousands of students. Will follow for almost six weeks a series of happenings alternating with discussions between student representatives and those of authorities blowing hot and cold to the rhythm of debates internal to the Communist Party. The positions within the Party are crystallized around two poles, that of firmness towards the protesters and that of the partisans of a

conciliatory approach towards the demands of political deepening of the reforms.

Deng Xiaoping's adhesion to the firm line was decisive. The "*small helmsman*" indeed feared that pledges given to the protesters would open the way to new demonstrations and to a period of instability comparable to the Cultural Revolution from which the country was barely emerging. He considered that lasting political and social stability was essential for the continuation and deepening of the considerable reforms which he was carrying out, to which certain conservative circles would not fail to attribute an extension or a broadening of the demonstrations.

Mikhail Gorbachev's historic state visit took place in early May while Tiananmen Square was still occupied. The impossibility to conduct this visit under good conditions will play a role in the approach ultimately adopted, as will the fear of foreign interference to stir up and to orient student movements.

On May 19, 1989, when the Secretary General of the Communist Party Zhao Ziyang, former Prime Minister, had just delivered a speech of appeasement, martial law was nevertheless proclaimed. The majority of the Political Bureau now leant in favour of firmness and Zhao was dismissed. It will take more than two weeks for the protests to come to a complete halt, as repressive approaches against students faced opposition from part of the armed forces in the Beijing region and the sometimes-active disapproval of the capital's population.

The physical liquidation of the occupation movement occurred on the night of June 4, 1989. For a few months, collaboration between China and the West was frozen, domestic economic reforms were called into question by some. However, the support of the provincial governors, noting the very positive effects of the policies followed in the pilot areas, quickly imposed the success of the reform trend. The rapid positive outcomes of this new economic order helped to rally hitherto sceptical popular strata, especially among workers and peasants.

Thirty years later, the Spring 1989 demands no longer seem topical. While concern for the future was the underlying brand of popular support for students, economic and social progress including unprecedented access in China to real-life individual freedoms (access to property, freedom of establishment, freedom of movement, choice of studies and profession ...) provide a satisfactory answer for most citizens. The efforts of the current government to curb the latent corruption of certain senior executives show, however, that vigilance remains essential to prevent the successes of the Revolution from being called into question by individual or collective abuses.

## XL DRUNK SHRIMPS BALLET

My political background couldn't be better used. In charge of monitoring social developments in the so-called transition countries, it is ultimately my responsibility to document their announced collapse in the labour field or, in rare cases, to interpret their resilience. After having organized in Prague the last meeting of socialist countries on the computerization of pensions with Cuban, Soviet, Vietnamese delegates quietly debating while the velvet revolution submerged the banks of the Vltava - here I am mandated to spend two weeks in January 1990 at the bedside of the Chinese reform pilots.

We were two pilgrims from Geneva. Two other eminent experts came from North American universities and a fifth one was a senior executive from the Singapore pension fund. Locals considered Singapore as a paradise for: the country is rich and Chinese speaking. The dramas of Tian An Men already officially forgotten, it was the time when China was testing there and everywhere to try to identify the best characteristics of the new society it needed to build. Our two research bases were in the south, Shenzhen, a town on the way to becoming an industrial giant at the gates of Hong Kong, and a large island off Canton, formerly a penitentiary but now promised the best of reforming futures, Hainan.

It was my first visit to China. I entered it by metro, from Hong Kong, with the thousands of workers who went back and forth every day, like a vulgar Gessian going to Geneva<sup>78</sup>. Damn light, the bamboo curtain!

The three days in Shenzhen were superb. After the hours of often heated discussions, we benefited with my colleague from freebies offered by officials from Beijing. We were entitled to very informal visits to places of relaxation outside the walls of our residential seminar. Nothing but very honest, by the way. No more flirting than a fork or knife around the bowl of rice, but it was downright pleasant, so far from the Puritan clichés of official Maoism. One of our initiators has, over the years, become a great friend, later joining the Geneva teams. Shenzhen is no stranger to this.

To reach Hainan Island, you had to take the train to Canton first. Two hours ride at the time for a hundred kilometres, the most difficult being for our hosts to make the controller accept that a contingent of foreigners share a compartment with government officials. The palaver was tough, in a context where even the elevators were still operated under the close watch of employees preserving from temptations guests they supplied with lemonades

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<sup>78</sup> While a number of UN and other international organisations are based in Geneva (Switzerland), a majority of their staff members leave in neighboring France, mainly in the so-called Pays de Gex – Gex county – whose inhabitants are the Gessian.

and other snacks on the occasion of a verticality interrupted at ten p.m. for lifters' rest sake.

Canton-Haikou by ferry, embarkation on the bus that will transport us the days to come, south-north along the mountain range splitting in its middle a patchwork of tea plantations; north-south, Sanya-Haikou along a superb virgin coast, alternating white sands and coconut groves. The distance between the two points of the island is three hundred kilometres, passed to widen the eyes while taking up with our hosts revolutionary songs which only my colleague, German and leftist, and I also knew. Big advantage over the eminent experts, no Red Flag in the curriculum of North American universities!

Another decisive advantage for the Geneva team is the meals. Without being Koh-Lanta<sup>79</sup>, the eating habits of our hosts baffled the noble professors, who balked at the dried scorpions and even more before the shrimp dancing. The idea is however simple: take a good dose of fresh and alive shrimps, place them in a hollow glass dish that is filled with rice alcohol up to the top of their paws, place the lid so that the vapours permeate well the arthropod spirit. The shrimps then jump in all directions to escape ethylic coma, they are said to dance. Remove the cover, choose your beast, capture it in very firm chopsticks and immerse it while simmering in the neighbouring pot of hot broth to taste it pink and whole. The universities have withdrawn. Singapore went to the end, but that did not impress, he was Chinese. The two bearded men that we were had passed the test. I tend to believe that the drunk shrimp ball has helped build the prestige that our organization continues to enjoy, when we talk about social security in China.

There is no good party that does not come to an end.

My colleague and I will depart via Hong Kong. We take advantage of the few hours before Swissair take off to find out in Kowloon a small restaurant with cutlery and check fabric tablecloths serving all these delights that no shrimp, even drunk, will ever oust : bread, cheese, steak, fries and Beaujolais.

Delighted taste buds let euphoria win over. We decide to walk back to the airport. We only owe it to a wandering taxi not to miss the call...

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<sup>79</sup> Koh-Lanta, named after an island offshore Thailand, is the name of a famous French TV show where two teams have to struggle with nature to survive, including for food composed of local fruits but also local animals of all kinds and sizes.



## MCMXC THE CHUNNEL

High school student nostalgic from Buonaparte times, I dreamed of the Emperor's plans to invade the perfidious Albion from below the sea. Jules Verne sauce Napoleon, which eventually becomes reality.

The junction between British and French teams working in the drilling of the Chunnel Service Tunnel is carried out on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1990. The decision to realize a Channel submarine rail link had been taken in 1986 by the French President, François Mitterrand, and the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, after consulting a group of experts and with the support of a banking consortium. However, the latter could not obtain government guarantee for the project, a guarantee to which Mrs Thatcher was opposed.

The Channel Tunnel is therefore a private endeavour. A company created for that purpose was responsible for the realization then the management of the tunnel which drilling, started in 1986, allowed an opening in 1994. The costs having been underestimated and the revenues overestimated, which is a fairly frequent approach for bidders, Eurotunnel quickly found itself in great financial difficulty. Its share lost practically all value on the stock market. The company went under receivership, its debt was "restructured", that is to say lightened. Shares changed hands and names and the duration of the concession, initially 50 years was increased to one hundred years.

Eurotunnel thus benefited from very favourable conditions for its financial recovery, conditions which the European Commission has never envisaged for its defaulting Member States and which it would have refused had Eurotunnel had the status of a public entity corresponding to its mandate.

Beyond the financial ups and downs, the technical realization of the Channel Tunnel remains unmatched to date. The "Chunnel" is still the longest underwater structure in the world, the list of underwater tunnels not being very extensive. In particular, the Channel Tunnel is the only structure thus connecting two countries.

The idea of establishing a permanent link between the continent and the British Isles had indeed been studied seriously since the beginning of the nineteenth century, sometimes with implementation starting, but wars or last-minute fears lead to their abandonment.

The two main protagonists therefore needed an exceptional vision to break free from a historic taboo barely forty years after the end of a war during which the inviolable British insularity had weighed heavily on the faith of the Western allies in their final victory.

As is easy to understand, the objections, obstacles and reluctance to a cross-Channel connection had in the past been mainly the fact of spokespersons for British opinion, fearing for its military security, for its cultural integrity or for its harmlessness sanitary.

The fact that considerable private financial interests were at stake certainly helped to facilitate the acceptability of this last project. The ideological framework entrusted the States, according to British leaders strongly inspired by the most neo-liberal of economic theories, with the primary mission to do nothing to prevent the masters of the market from carrying out their profit maximization strategies - whatever the risks to the community.

## XLI KAREN

Parousia - the divine appearance - is the word that best evokes my first confrontation with Karen.

Confrontation there was since, both sitting in the union leadership, we were at the first session of the mandate, me almost seated, she crossing the door, shrouded in December sunset. Her blue eyes so blue at pupil height, a look that plunged deep into mine, as in exploration and quest of vis-à-vis.

I had lost the illusion of easy conquests.

The perception of my sloppiness had, in short, softened me: former kisses - colleague, neighbour, friend of friend - were practiced only in chaste memorial of expired flirtation. I was at a point where the prestige, if any, was very insufficient to overcome the lack of appetite for a fat man in his forties.

The arrival of Karen in my realm revived the demons - it was still necessary that she did more than her share.

The disillusionment of my return from Africa had inhibited my capacity for initiative. It cost her various signals, a great month of perseverance, before I perceived a possibility and invested myself in it.

As soon as started, our dance got excited. Four weeks, and an exchange of valentine hearts seals the pact which would be physical. Fifteen more days, and the timely absence of her husband allows us to consume. One extra week, and we organize a truancy day to better discover ourselves.

We were around Easter. For Monique the sudden revelation of my marital sprains was taking a disturbing turn. She owed this warning to my sister that an over-watered stopover had flooded with secrets during a Parisian mission.

Karen and I kept our eyes on the whole horizon, but by stormy weather this line was leaking. There was a clumsy first attempt at untying spouse relationship. Only two days, and I was picked up by the patrol. Karen, who was then not ready to desert, was in turn betrayed. Her husband expelled her when I reinstated.

The months that followed we rebuilt our trust, refound ourselves, reengaged our destinies.

As we had just been scalded, we agreed to try the big leap of life again only when we were sure we would succeed. It is therefore on this sealed pact that we separate for the first time, the October of my forties. Nine months of probation, she Lemanic, me from Beijing, I had just received the managerial approval.

I have the feeling, it is the first time, that I betray for good.

Monique had the illusion that the stay in China would rebuild us during our twentieth year of marriage. For me, this departure was a springboard from which I would fly away on new weddings.

## **MCMXCI END OF THE USSR**

During the spring of 1990, my third visit with Monique to the land of Lenin, the USSR appeared to be in very bad shape. Black market, chaos and famine, we were far from the splendours of 1978 or the beautiful remains of 1987.

A few months later, all was done. On December 8, 1991, the Presidents of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus issued a declaration stating that the Soviet Union had been dissolved. On December 25, 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev acknowledged it, and resigned as president of the Soviet Union.

The USSR, created on December 30, 1922, had thus lasted a little less than seventy years, during which it had gradually established itself as a great world power, a new type of state, and a hope for many social and national movements in all regions of the world.

The USSR wanted by Lenin was not simply the successor of the tsarist empire. The republics which composed it each enjoyed a significant degree of autonomy, notably cultural, which paradoxically facilitated its disintegration in 1991.

The USSR was the first independent state to place itself under the banner of Marxism. Its weight as the largest state in the world further accentuated the importance of this choice. The Soviet Union had created to itself obligation of success as an alternative model to regimes dominated by supporters of economic liberalism, as well as considerable cross-border responsibilities in the name of proletarian internationalism.

Relying only on its own forces, the Soviet Union had, at the beginning of its existence, to find the political and material means to recover from the disasters of the First World War, while confronting militarily and politically internal and foreign forces looking for its immediate destruction.

These ways and means, brutal as they were for entire categories of the population and a large number of individuals, transformed in a few years the USSR,

successor of a very rural and underdeveloped tsarist state, into one of the first world economic powers. It was thus able to contain and repel the Nazi invasion at the cost of new sacrifices, made with remarkable courage by a population without the support of which resistance would not have been possible.

Were it not for the USSR and its strength, including its counterattack, the victory of the Allies in 1945 would have been much more difficult to take shape. After the Second World War, the USSR, which became a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, started to be able to count on an increasing number of allies among European countries as well as in the newly independent countries. This network of alliances strengthened Soviet power and credibility, but created new imperatives of solidarity, costly and sometimes hazardous.

At the same time, the Soviet Union was pursuing ambitious and often very effective domestic policies in the fields of education, culture, science and technology, health, social welfare. Until the third-quarter of the 20th century, the USSR seemed to be on a par with its great rival, the United States, which it even surpassed in certain advanced fields.

Decadence and then the rapid fall over fifteen years have been the subject of numerous analyses which seem to converge in highlighting three negative factors fatal to the Soviet experience: the lack of confidence in the popular masses, considered as subjects and not drivers of politics; the excessive power without real control of an oligarchy present at all levels of the state; the considerable burden of international obligations on the national economy.

The achievements of the USSR and the field of possibilities it has opened are, however, undeniable. Between 1913 and 1989, per capita income increased more in the USSR than in the United States - 460% as against 300%. The Soviet people as a whole had access to culture, education, care, at levels still unknown in many countries outside the most privileged strata. Equality in law and in fact between men and women was also from 1917 onwards one of the major societal contributions of the Revolution.

The USSR made people dream, the dream fell apart. But the experiment has taken place. It has borne fruits and provided lessons of great value for the construction of other tomorrows, which will be able to sing more harmoniously and for a longer time.

## XLII BEIJING

It must have been raining when the whole family joined Beijing in October 1991. At least that is the atmosphere that Madenn and Gwenaël recreate, when they recollect the tears in their eyes trying to discern an exterior from the porthole windows of the Kunlun hotel. It is true that Beijing is not quite a bucolic destination for young girls acclimated to the Salève mountains and raised under the papaya trees.

Madenn had the school as an anchor, and it worked. For Gwenaël, who was preparing her baccalaureate as a free candidate since that class level was missing at the French local school, it was undoubtedly more difficult. Little contact with real people who are not her relatives during the six or seven months of her family stay.

These relatives, they severely jolted.

Karen's oath keeps my mind occupied. We are in an era, should it be recalled, without a laptop or internet, where long-distance telephone lines are still in their infancy. Staying in touch is therefore a daily challenge. Official communication lines bear the brunt, at a cost that somewhat terrifies me when I discover it, visaing with dignity the expense register. I allow myself a few instalments to repay my debt, and henceforth limit my phone calls.

Karen and I, however, had two escapes along this path of waiting that we imposed on ourselves. Two unmissable launching windows: at the start of the calendar year, an international trade union congress brings us together in Austria for a fortnight; in May, properly arranged technical consultations made me visit the head office for another fortnight. Consultations in fact purely imaginary, I had simply given myself leave for a trip funded out of so much personal money accumulated, that the purchase of a Swissair flight barely scratched its surface by the size of a love confetti.

These interludes, Monique, I believe, had not fanned them, all to build a porcelain life around a marital loyalty which she hoped fully recovered.

However, neither Karen, now free, nor me, tenderly ubiquitous, made mystery of our intermittence. In Vienna or in Geneva, our couple was known and recognized, public and displayed. Many could have been disclosure opportunities. However, this was not the case, as if those who knew and could have referred it had chosen to remain neutral. They were silent while waiting to see where this improbable strategy would lead us.

The deadline was approaching. We had chosen the beginning of July for our real reunion. The opportunity was provided by another union gathering, at



the end of which I would break all bridges without returning to the wedding lock, extending in cross-Atlantic holidays, distance is mother of safety, my declaration of adulterous choice. Cowardly effective!

The more Beijing caught fire under summer the more I became anxious. Was the jump that I was up to the right one? Two, three reasons for these late doubts. I was a little ashamed of what we were preparing - kick of the ass, dagger in the back, blunt or heart-breaking, the weapon was not noble. The fear of failing again, because I had indeed once tried to change skiff already, but the Karen boat had pitched us so much that I was ejected. And above all, and all of a sudden, the vision of another elsewhere that was revealed.

An April mission to the provinces of China. As on every trip, a colleague accompanied. Feminine secretarial presence. They were three eligible in total. The first round had just been completed. The one whose turn it was, nothing suggested that ... she had without incident opened the rotation in December, during a trip to the West to which Monique was also part. This time, it was the two of us with an assistant who disappeared just enough for our pheromones to magnetize.

It was sweet, it was tender, it was unexpected. To the point of making me doubt that the Karen way was inevitable since there was another one opening. Almost thirty years later, I am still following this Rabbit - this is how I call her, for her I am the Tiger. One day our steps will unite forever. Thirty years ago, it was only a faint glimmer on the horizon of possibilities. We sensed, but could not be sure: too fast, too different, she was too fresh a bride, I was too engaged elsewhere.

This elsewhere had to be. I got bogged down in so many lying knots that without cutting through it, my heart would choke out. Rabbit was not ready, so Karen should be. I drink to convince myself.

## MCMXCII END OF APARTHEID

Butterfly theory. It was in the late 1980s that our Union withdrew its meagre assets from a bank suspected of dealing with the South African regime. This movement, however weak it was, contributed to the collapse of the citadel.

On March 17, 1992, South African President Frederik de Klerk received by referendum the specific mandate to negotiate a new constitution with the African National Congress representing the indigenous majority.

Seventy percent of the voters (only "*whites*" according to the national classification at the time) then voted to end the apartheid regime.

Apartheid, or "*separate development policy*", had taken on a very precise legislative form in South Africa since 1948. It corresponded in fact, since the 17th century, to the practice of European settlers fearing for the survival of their power.

With African independences, the policy of apartheid, also contested from within, was the subject of strong international criticism. South Africa was excluded from United Nations agencies such as the International Labour Organization or the World Health Organization, as well as from the International Olympic Committee. It was not until 1976, after a particularly bloody repression of the Soweto riots, that economic sanctions supported the political condemnation.

To avoid these sanctions completely destroying the economy of the country, and thus going against the objective of keeping at all costs in South Africa colonists not recognizing themselves in any colonial power, Presidents Pieter Botha then Frederik de Klerk embarked from 1978 on a policy of reforms allowing the gradual development of social mix.

The international community considered that these progress were insufficient to allow for the lifting of sanctions. A decisive step was therefore taken in February 1990 with the release of Nelson Mandela, a symbol of the struggle against apartheid, imprisoned

in this capacity for 28 years. The two parties - Klerk's presidency and the African National Congress - then began negotiations of a constitutional scope, which made it possible to avoid civil war and restore the economic situation of the country without disruption in the ownership of the means of production and exchange. The election of Nelson Mandela as president of the republic completed the country's transformation in 1994.

With its 55 million inhabitants, South Africa is now a strong emerging power recognized as such by its BRICS partners - Brazil, Russia, India and China. Its economy remains essentially in the hands of the same ruling class. Even if a part of the population - 800,000 people, or 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the so-called "white" population - left the country for fear of the consequences of the end of apartheid on their physical and economic security, the country hosted qualified immigration that more than helped to offset the demographic impact of departures.

The exit from apartheid was therefore carried out relatively calmly and efficiently.

A "separate development" regime however continues to operate in other countries and under other skies, without the international community being moved to the same extent. We can cite among the replicas to apartheid, without this list being exhaustive, the discriminatory practices that marked the United States until the 1960s, the management by Israel of the Palestinian territories, the repression against minorities in certain countries of Asia, or the non-recognition of nationality for Russian-speaking citizens in the Baltic countries which became independent during the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The tolerance and even the benevolence which a part of the world's governments show towards breaches of fundamental rights which often have nothing to envy the worst practices of apartheid recalls in counterpoint that the international fight for the freedom of the South African people did not spontaneously mobilize all the powers. For many years, the same arguments of stability, non-interference, economic preference, struggle for civilization, cultural affinity, which are

used today to cover other abuses, also perpetrated for decades, served the cause of supporters of racist South Africa.

## XLIII ULAAN BAATAR

My Beijing functions covered a double jurisdiction, China and Mongolia, one still popular, the other not so much anymore.

This bifid character was very much like horse and lark pâté, but the intermittent attention I owed to our neighbour to the North nonetheless motivated a dozen visits to Ulaan Baatar.

After the surprise of the first disembarkation, the enthusiasm for these trips gradually subsided. For the Chinese, the expression "*Mongolian doctor*" means more or less quack, something which does not live up to the ambitions displayed. The post-Soviet Ulaan Baatar was a bit like that: a city to make you love Beijing when you finally came home.

The climate, of course.

My Mongolian visits have taken place in all seasons, except in summer, devoted to other pleasures. Otherwise, whatever the month, it was always snow in the ditches and icicles at the stream, whether it be May, September or January, with the 20 and a few degrees below zero making the crossing of Sukhbaatar square (Genghis Khan) worthy of a feat of freediving in the frozen air, rarefied by the altitude and polluted by coal-fired power plants whose particles remained trapped in the urban basin.

Monique accompanied me a few times.

She gained from being able to practice the Russian language - the Mongols there write in Cyrillic, the curious vertical sleds of the traditional alphabet have remained only in the so-called inner Mongolia, which is in made outside, in China.

She received a fraternal welcome - I dare not write warm! - from the Mongols, with as a testimony of friendship a superb dress coat of the steppes which she hardly had the occasion to wear.

She walked through the gardens of the presidential palace for distinguished guests, where the height of refinement, for the butler in tailcoat, was to bring us a crystal carafe full of ice water drawn from the well of the estate. She survived the failure of the heating system. One of the two Soviet urban boilers having given up functioning, the half-city where our hotel was located enjoyed ambient winter temperature; to warm oneself up, we run laps without purpose in a ministerial car, the ventilation of the ZiL running at maximum.

Monique was not part to all of my mongolisms.

The Chinese personnel were untold persona more or less non grata - the Mongols had no confidence in those who still hold half of their steppes.

There was therefore only the faithful Bangladeshi deputy to learn of my turpitudes. He who by religious conviction did not drink alcohol was always of a rare tolerance for my soaking, and of a superb discretion.

He said nothing then, when tired of too much frost I dragged him to the overcrowded bar of the only hotel for foreigners - I usually lived in those of the government, much quieter -, when I held him back to get drunk after the banquet, when I recruited him to negotiate with a high female stature a drunken pass after which, while I passed out, he unearthed a driver to bring the wench to her future customers.

It was my shame, and my second STD.

MCMXCIII

"GONE WHERE? GONE FROM MY SIGHT. THAT IS ALL."<sup>80</sup>

I was on a rascal mop with Karen through the Forez mountains when the radio knocked us down, this calm morning of May 1, 1993, with an incredible news: Pierre Beregovoy had committed suicide just over a month after leaving the office of Prime Minister of François Mitterrand he had occupied for a year. His move was motivated by cascading revelations from the press about the ambiguous reports he and some members of his family had had with financiers of sometimes questionable reputation.

The death of Pierre Beregovoy aroused a particular emotion. He was a long time follower of the President of the Republic who, in May 1981, had appointed him Secretary General of the Elysée, a strategic post if ever there was one. He had taken strong and clear positions against the corruption of politicians during his general policy speech in 1992. He was one of the very few politicians who held the highest office although they came from the lower classes.

Pierre Beregovoy was the son of an officer in the army of the Tsar who emigrated during the Soviet Revolution, then became a worker in France through the constraints of exile. He himself was a milling worker then railroad worker, resistant, later employed at the public French gas company before devoting himself to politics in the seventies. He had not ceased to be an active militant of the socialist movement since the end of the Second World War.

In the light of the financial scandals splashing at regular intervals number of members of the French political elites, the facts reproached by the press to Pierre Beregovoy seem all in all benign. This was about a personal loan in the process of repayment, taken out with a financier, also a friend of the President, implicated in other cases of corruption, and gifts in

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80 *"Gone from my sight"*, prose poem by the Reverend Luther F. Beecher (1813-1903)

kind on his part and that of another accused to members of the Beregovoy family.

It seems that despite the relative weakness of charges never proven, Pierre Bérégovoy considered these attacks on what he considered his honour as unbearable, tainting the commitment of his life in favour of social progress.

The President of the Republic was moved, to the point of getting angry, during the funeral, against those who *"could throw out to dogs the honour of a man and ultimately his life."* Such indignation and expressions of sympathy emanated from different political currents at the time, as if the *"happy few"* felt in part responsible for the suicide of a man who had become their equal although not familiar with an environment which ultimately had crushed him.

As Jean-Pierre Chevènement pointed out, a former minister who had dissociated himself from a leftist government converted to economic liberalism and in search of power for power, the death of Pierre Bérégovoy was *"the symbol of the contradictions and defeats of socialist power: (... he) embodied, more than any other, the knot of contradictions which, tightened over the years by his friends and himself, ended up stifling the left"*.

The list of modern French politicians who committed suicide for reasons related to their duties is not very long, a dozen cases from Roger Salengro, attacked in 1936 on his attitude during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War to Jean Germain, Senator mayor of Tours in 2015, accused of having hired in his staff the manager of a tourism project developed in partnership with this same town hall.

Almost all of these deaths were socialist or related.

This obviously does not mean that the socialist party would be the one containing the most corrupt members among its leaders - but undoubtedly responds to the fact that, as J.-P. Chevènement noted, the contradiction is excessively strong for some, particularly lucid or particularly vulnerable, between their political ideals and the way in which, once elected, they must exercise responsibilities.



The relation to the money-king, in particular, seems to have weighed particularly heavy on the conscience of men and women prisoners of a structure which did not wish or could not get rid of a gangrenous economic and social system, the rejection of which had nevertheless enabled their election.

## XLIV THE RENUNCIATION

Our first year in Beijing, Monique dreamed of reconstruction, and I dreamed of flight forward.

I have no doubt some talent for dissimulation. On this evening of June, the bomb that I dropped - the mission that I undertake in a few days, which will lead me to America to administer our pension fund, is very real, but I will not do it alone. Karen is back to the pinnacle of my love, and it is with her that I will now live. The links of so far are dissolved, and I do not want to hear any more about our past when I return to Beijing -, Monique could not believe it, attributing to too much alcohol that impaled my diction such a regurgitation of fantasies.

Karen herself had to over the phone confirm the reality of our plans for her to accept the offense. Monique nevertheless decided to go to the goodbye party which I had entrusted to the foot soldiers of the office. It was expected to be a ritual to celebrate holidays. The ceremonial became however one of affliction, since the secret was exposed and the drama authentic.

Mind-blowing, Monique's strength through this evening of shame. A force that enabled her to get on the stage and to karaoke-sing a Chinese love song secretly repeated for the occasion, before we ran away to scream in private the last act of our catharsis.

Barely two months later, I ask her to come back. The rising moon had only been mild during the weeks of American scenery.

On the way through Europe, on my return to Beijing, the other routine that stuck to the decor of my existence hardly reflected serene vibrations. No week without a quarrel, arising, often on my own, for less than nothing and almost everything, no evening without my drinking to forget that we were going, Karen and I, to yell at each other again just as we had just done.

A new team with bloody jaws. The thunderclap of the terrible accident sparking the intercessor assistant whom Karen and I fancied as the person making our future possible; the half-funny face soup that we were served at the places I had frequented with Monique, when awkwardly I tried to anchor the new princess that had made the queen fall - these tomorrows, for sure, were quick and loud disillusion.

However, I continue to pretend - since it seems that I am an expert at this. Karen, accompanied to the airport for her return to Geneva, benefits from the honours attached to her dignity as official concubine. She does not know, no one in Beijing knows, that the day before I had by telephone managed to convince the destitute queen to come back to her throne.

Monique is back, with as a guarantor for the irreversible Madenn's anticipated repatriation, just in time for the start of the new school year (Gwenaël had succeeded in the impossible attempt of the baccalaureat prepared by correspondence and would sail alone at the university).

The assistant is still very weak on his hospital bed when I tell him the news. He says I'm right, I'm reassured.

But I don't say everything - to myself either.

Because now I know, when so much water has flowed, that a deep reason to scuttle my brand-new Karen vessel was to rail for a while, in order to later board the sampan where I saw Rabbit sailing side by side.

## MCMXCIV

### DISCOUNT FOR AGE REASON

My entry into working life in 1968 was marked by the abolition of the age penalty on minimum wage for young workers, and the area discount for rural minimum wage-earners. Equality lasted a quarter of a century before a government endeavours, without success, to ruin it again.

On March 30, 1994, the French cohabitation government led by Édouard Balladur announced the suspension and then the withdrawal of the CIP project - professional integration contract - which he nonetheless had presented as a flagship measure in its program to fight unemployment among young people.

This retreat follows numerous and important demonstrations by those to be affected, denouncing in this system the implementation of reduced remuneration for young workers. The CIP essentially made it possible to pay workers under the age of 26 at only 80% of the minimum wage, for up to 2 years. Public opinion massively supported the protest movement, seeing in this project a reintroduction of the age penalty which strikes in 1968 had allowed the abolition.

The CIP was one of the many avatars of so-called programs to fight unemployment among young people carried out almost continuously, and without any real positive effect, by all the governments of the Fifth Republic since the deterioration of the job market in the 1970s. It was replaced by a system of direct assistance to companies hiring young workers for a period of at least eighteen months.

Unemployment, when it spreads, first results in a restriction in hiring. It therefore particularly affects young people. According to OECD calculations, the unemployment rate for young people under the age of 25 in France in 2018 was 20.8%, one of the highest among the member countries. This rate did not even take into account extensions of the duration of studies for the sole purpose of retaining protection and social status, nor the proliferation of unpaid or very low-paid internships.

The panoply of measures recommended to combat the overrepresentation of young people in the population looking for work has hardly changed over time. These are either financial incentives to hire, or the search for an improvement in vocational training, or a reduction in legal protections for young workers - or even all workers.

None of these measures seems to have produced any effect other than strengthening the share of capital income in the distribution of value added. Over a period of 35 years (between 1980 and 2015) the share in value added going to work remuneration (salaries, wages, social security contributions) decreased from 75 to slightly less than 65% - Eurostat figures -, while the rate of unemployment went from 5 to 10% of the active population, from 10 to 25% for young people under 25 years - source INSEE.

How to explain the apparent inertia of successive governments in an area which is nevertheless crucial for social peace?

The multiplication of tax aid paid to companies without commitment to be made obviously diverts to the benefit of a few a significant part of the resources of the State which primary objective - to act at the service of the community - is thus neglected. The simple formula that *"it is better to pay retirees than unemployed"* is superbly ignored by governments whose main concern seems to be to further reduce the share of social spending in the use of wealth, to the detriment of those who precisely create this wealth.

For several decades now, almost all of the developed economies have adhered to a creed of limiting public spending and minimal redistribution of income, while when consulting economic and social data the corresponding policies demonstrate rare social ineffectiveness. The development gaps are moreover narrowing between the so-called advanced countries and the so-called emerging countries where strong policies of wage redistribution, strengthening of purchasing power and access to employment are in place, as in China.

These counterexamples have little influence on the dominant thought in the West. However, populations who

are more and more aware of what is happening elsewhere are less and less trusting those to whom a system of representation without obligation of result obliges them to delegate a voice that a formal democracy granted them. Some thus play with fire without fear of burning themselves, assured that they are able, when the time comes, to divert the flames for their benefit, as they knew how to do in the past. Perhaps forgetting that history is not an eternal beginning<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> These prophetic lines were written long before COVID19 came to give them the anointing of reality

## XLV RABBIT?

There was Rabbit before, Rabbit during and luckily Rabbit after Karen.

The precocious Rabbit, that of June 1992, was intermittent. We had a few trips, a few touches, a few escapades. In fact I discovered her, and she gradually accepted me. Not that she lacked recognition, since Rabbit had just married the one, she will tell me, whom she had long coveted, a former schoolmate, darling of the young red guards in braids conquered through hard struggle.

Perhaps she was missing a bit of this fantasy that was beginning to permeate post-Maoist society, and was she hoping that I could spray her with a few scents? There is indeed, in the Chinese families of the working aristocracy, a form of rigorism which weighed a little heavy on the shoulders of her less than thirty years. Missions accelerated and her turn was soon back. Our mutual discovery was followed by an excursion to Confucius' manes, where we shared strawberries and sleepless nights.

Rabbit in Karen's time was discretion and probably bitterness.

She doesn't talk about it - even after all these decades. However, shortly after my exchange of wives, of which she had heard by chance just like her colleagues - I had not had the cynicism, the unconsciousness or the correction to warn her -, Rabbit went away for an Italian training of a few weeks, long enough to prevent her from frequenting too much the one whom I sometimes wish I had not had.

When she returned from the boot, it was the assistant's accident. Rabbit appreciated him as everyone else, serving night and day to make up for the shortcomings of the hospital staff. It was she who volunteered to accompany the medical trip to convalescence in an English-speaking clinic in Bangkok. On her return, Karen was gone, Monique was back, and Rabbit decided: change of career direction. She joined another international organisation, reason cited proximity to home. There must have been another unpleasant taste behind it, but we don't talk about this.

Rabbit gone, the office seems a little sad. I used to catch a glimpse of her through the doorway separating our offices, barely leaning to pee. Knowing she was two steps away warmed me up, there was no day without a peppery hint joining our eyes. Everything is duller now, I have to be reasonable, it's time to grow up.

Then comes this Martian day of my birthday. Delivery of an armful of red roses without a card or signal but I have no doubt - Rabbit alone will know how to reconnect with us. Truth of evidence: Monique does not practice

local florists, Karen from her Europe, the Internet does not yet exist, would not have known how to do it, and moreover we did not get back in touch. I extort, on the grounds of incomplete administrative formalities, a contact number from colleagues whom I know are close to her - no e-mail, nor cell-phone in those distant times, one had to be constant to find traces - and here I am with Rabbit on the phone.

She does not confirm for the flowers but agrees to meet. We will have our first real clandestine meeting in a hotel room where, not knowing how things would turn, I had delivered in advance all appetizers that room service offers. She is coming, and I know she is the future. There will be Rabbit next after Karen.

There will be, but not instantly, not immediately. It is May of the year of the Rooster, and Rabbit is pregnant. Oh, not from me, we didn't really have time to consume enough to fertilize, but rather from her husband, in whose arms my inconsistencies had confirmed her. The months that followed, I saw her grow round. We visited a constellation of four- or five-star hotels in central Beijing, afternoon rooms settled the next day. As we became more united to each other, I suffered more from the knowledge of her linked because of decorum and duty to an elsewhere which soon monopolized her, prenatal then postpartum.

In dire need of Rabbit, I could have found back my family nest and refrain the calls of the wandering out of the marital bed. Turpitudes however are hard to tear off. Finding Karen back is all too easy for me. This new outbreak was short-lived, but short as it was, it caused its damage.

Monique was hurt again. And I suffered from it.



MCMXCV

GRANDFATHER YITZHAK

This morning, I went to the Israeli Embassy in Moscow to sign, on behalf of my organization, the register of condolences. It's not just protocol. The emotion is there, sincere.

Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel, was assassinated on November 4, 1995 in Jerusalem by an extremist of Israelite faith. He had received, together with Shimon Peres then Minister for Foreign Affairs of his government and the President of the Palestinian Authority Yasser Arafat, the Nobel Peace Prize 1994 for their contribution to the negotiation of the Oslo agreements which, a year earlier, had appeared as a considerable step forward towards the resolution of a conflict dating back almost fifty years.

The Oslo Accords created the Palestinian Authority and ceded partial control of certain areas of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to the Palestinians. The Palestinian Authority renounced the use of violence and recognized Israel in an official letter. Israel in return recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization PLO on September 9 , 1993 .

The Oslo Accords are the result of a process of negotiation desired by the international community and in some way driven by it. Europe and the United States ruled by Bill Clinton played a major role in this process, officially started at a conference held in Madrid in 1991.

These agreements are in fact a series of treaties governing the relative autonomy of the territories over which Israel recognized the Palestinian Authority as having legal jurisdiction. The duration of five years for which they were concluded was to allow the two parties to complete their discussions, and to reach a real peace agreement.

It was the perspectives thus opened that caused the death of Yitzhak Rabin, victim of a religious fanatic of his own country and his own faith. The Israeli ultras did not accept what they called territorial concessions made to the Palestinian Authority. They also did not

accept that the negotiation was carried out by a secularly inclined Labour government.

On the Palestinian side, the apparent de facto renunciation of Yasser Arafat to recover all of the ancestral lands of the Palestinian populations had also drawn strong criticism from part of the PLO. On the whole, however, the authority of the President of the Palestinian Authority was respected, and his life was not threatened.

The Oslo Accords suffered greatly from the death of Rabin. Even if, formally, the symbolic actions provided for by these agreements have been largely implemented, such as the establishment of a Palestinian government endowed with its own resources and real authority, even if international cooperation, bilateral and multilateral, has developed considerably with their signature, they were quickly downgraded, on the side of the Israeli government, from the status of a step towards a global agreement, to that of a compromise not likely to evolve otherwise than putting it into jeopardy.

Rabin's assassin has thus finally reached his goal.

## XLVI ORPHAN

My last conversation with my mother, the one the children called Mamie Minou - not that she particularly liked cats, but to distinguish her from their other grandmother, Mamie Mimi - took place by phone, from Beijing, for New Year's greetings . She had just been hospitalized following a cold spell in the Charentes, where she had retired at my sister's place, after having abandoned her native Paris and her low cost housing after over forty years of rental penalties because of income beyond the threshold.

Raymonde was born Kieffer on the day of the October Revolution, that is to say in 1917 and, as she mischievously pointed out, in November, the tsars of orthodox faith never accepting the reform desired by this catholic pope who took away 2 weeks on our calendar around the 16th century. She had just turned 77 and wished me a happy new year in China with a voice so weak that this famous Tintin limit<sup>82</sup>, she didn't seem to be able to transgress it much. She has gone on a Sunday, the 1<sup>st</sup> January proletarian irony that all ends on a day doubly a holiday.

Towards the end of the week, I find myself at the Boulou cemetery where she had chosen to rest, in the vault of the family of her husband, my father.

We are not too many for this last tribute. A small square on her side, just a triangle on the other, it is cold and sad. I feel that the audience counts a little on me. I proceed with a few sentences, where I celebrate more than the mother, the woman, the activist. Raymonde, former communist youth, former worker, dismissed for strike action before 1936 and her 20s, resistant, unionist, journalist. Talking was easy.

Family meal in the restaurant of the Hotel du Centre with all the family, two uncles, an aunt, a sister, a daughter. Le Boulou, almost the Spanish border, is a door next to nothing. I'm choking a little.

Too much drinking in recent days. My uncle, father's brother, gave me the cold shoulder the day before when I wanted to explain how badly I felt the loss of Karen. He must have sensed that my syllables collided for reasons other than maternal mourning. The rest of the party bundled up with nothing to say. I extricate myself even before the rousquilles<sup>83</sup> to the sorrow of the party. I catch Gwenaël - Madenn had to be excused because of school obligations, Monique watched over her in Beijing - and off we go by the roads of Catalonia. I want her to discover the places of my childhood, like a torch passed when the other died.

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<sup>82</sup> Tintin was known as the publication for youngsters between 7 and 77 years of age.

<sup>83</sup> Rousquilles is a typical Catalan pastry in the shape of a doughnut, coated in sugar with anis flavour.

We drove, visited, chatted. I struggled against sleep through excitement out of aniseed scent or flowering grenache and managed to complete the memorial journey without breakage or damage. We return to the Hotel du Centre after dark. What remains of our family has been gone for a long time, be it by train, be it by car. Gwenaël is available until morning, back from Lyon, I will leave after her, Perpignan - Paris, Paris - Beijing.

Normality was all traced. Father and elder daughter, extend the reunion, dinner, evening, inquire about her studies, her love, her future. But I feel that everything turns, that the ground is shifting. I can no longer hold on. Impossible to envisage feeding my body, turned into a walking distillery. We go towards our rooms and I plant her there, in the middle of a corridor, kiss barely placed on her incredulous cheek.

I collapse overnight. Gwenaël had left when I wake up, I never knew how she occupied these hours of abandonment, nor what note of unworthiness she gave to this derisory father.

I feel ashamed, but too late ...

## MCMXCVI PROFESSIONAL ARMY

I enjoyed my period of military service. This was not sufficient to save the institution.

Jacques Chirac's Defence Minister tabled in Parliament on November 16, 1996 a bill reforming the national service and abolishing conscription. The dissolution of the National Assembly and the coming to power of a left majority in a government of cohabitation prevented the examination of this text, but the idea was taken up again, and the military service was finally abolished in October 1997.

First called "*conscription*" then "*military service*" and, since 1965, "*national service*", the principle making compulsory for all young French men aged 20 to 25 a passage in the military ranks dates from 19 Fructidor year VI - September 5, 1798. The so-called Jourdan-Debrel law therefore survived almost two hundred years despite criticism by young civilians who sometimes felt that their serving time was particularly long. Conscription has represented in its history up to 5 years of service. It was contested even within the army, of which certain executives considered that the necessarily imperfect training of young conscripts, who, for the most part, chose to return to civilian life after their time was excessively expensive.

Mandatory service has also always known exemptions. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, these exemptions could benefit all the more young people since, on the one hand, the conscripts were drawn by lot - only a little more than a third of an age group -, while on the other hand family heads were exempt, and wealthy classes could stipend, to replace them, young people of poor extraction spared by the lottery. The exemptions were all the more appreciated by the beneficiaries that wars were frequent at these times and claimed many victims.

The unequal aspects of conscription disappeared in 1905 as part of a 2-year service. The duration then fluctuated between six months and three years, lengthening could succeed reductions. Thus, the 12-month service, first established in 1928, was repealed

in 1935, restored in 1946, extended in 1950, resumed in 1970.

The length of military service was reduced to ten months in 1990. From 1970, various alternative options were offered to conscripts in the form of a service in technical cooperation, in the police, in the gendarmerie. Special status was recognized for those most resistant to the military ("*conscientious objectors*"), and girls were admitted to perform their military service on a voluntary basis.

The reason advanced in 1995 by the right-wing Government for proposing to abolish military service was that, after the fall of the Soviet Union, France's defence needs had radically changed. The need to professionalize the armies appeared incompatible with the maintenance of conscription. Even if it was not unanimous, including in the parliamentary majority, this credo was retained by the socialist government taking over business.

The military executives no longer wished to burden themselves with conscripts who were sometimes rebellious, who demanded fundamental rights and were always republican, having learned over the years how to counter factious temptations, for example during the Algerian war. For its part, the new government thought it could not oppose an *a priori* popular measure among young people who were reluctant to discipline.

With the end of conscription, however, France lost an effective tool for social mix, civic education and professional training for the greatest number.

The slow disintegration of French society is often deemed to have accelerated with the end of conscription. No one will ever know if keeping one could have prevented the other.

## XLVII GENEVA ONCE AGAIN

At the end of autumn 1995, the return from Beijing to Geneva was nothing but very bourgeois. I made a stopover in Bangkok, in order to last savour among my peers the scent of being the first in the village before having to struggle to secure my slot in the ocean of high officials who line off the banks of Lake Geneva. We settled in a semi-opulent building, Ferney-Voltaire once again, a stone's throw from the international high school where Madenn knew how to climb the last steps separating her from the baccalaureate.

Gwenaël visited us in her spare time from Lyon where she learned how to become a doctor while preparing for a family life. Ning Ning the Chinese dog had accompanied us, the change of manners and climate did not affect him too much. For my part, I avoided Karen as best I could. Barely here and there a private lunch at the knowledge of all the commensals of the company's restaurant. At the same time, I kept the Rabbit's flame alive.

During my stay in China, other revolutions took place besides sentimental one which had upset me several times. There was the fall of the Soviet Union, and there was the advent of the Internet. When I leave Beijing, Gopher doesn't even stammer there. Twelve hours of flight, another world. When I join Geneva, the web is a reality, both professional and domestic.

Rabbit having chosen a contractual alternative in a strongly connected multinational, we could talk almost at leisure about our persistent desire for togetherness - email, blog, Skype, everything was good and we benefited from all.

My social status had not suffered from repatriation. It was therefore not too difficult for me to organize this and the other mission which, from time to time, brought me back to her. Through respect to the future, I acknowledge that these contacts were pleasant, full and round, but that neither of us placed them in a perspective of duration, permanence or exclusivity. It was too early on both sides. Mine, where still very scalded I had enough wounds left to lick to dare to risk being inflicted with others; her side, where a marriage she had longed after, and the pretty little egg it had fertilized - Dongdong was born under the sign of the Rooster, in December 1993 - were still too fresh for questioning.

Days, months passed, it could have been years.

Monique hardly found any exhilarating food in this European standardization. She too had started the descent where the envelope that

has been hosting us for so many decades ages. Her silhouette, standardized in the colours of Vernier's Echo, the choir that occupied a little her time and her talent, had become that of her singing companions - housewives of almost fifty years.

The addiction could have continued and, calmly, let me get dusty growing bacon while awaiting for promotions which, inevitably, would end up falling due thanks to seniority and interpersonal skills.

Chance, or necessity? The costume of second in town ends up cracking at the corners. Conflict of hierarchy, nothing really irremediable, but conflict all the same; Moscow demand, a representative was needed on post-Soviet lands. The sulphurous reputation of a communist who had managed to lead his junk through the tapered blades of the bamboo curtain did not harm. I apply, I am told to have good hope.

The paper-pusher era is over, a new slice of life is offered to the family - at least what is left of it: the children weave their own webs, only Ning Ning will accompany us.



MCMXCVII  
ALMA BRIDGE

Madenn was not yet eighteen. Her dismay convinced me of the gravity of the moment. It is August 31, 1997, a car traveling at high speed has just been embedded in one of the pillars supporting the external pavement at the tunnel known as the Pont de l'Alma in Paris. On board four people, including Princess Diana who died shortly after arriving at the hospital.

Her divorce from the heir to the British throne had been followed and commented on by ordinary people from many countries of the world for whom Diana symbolized the fight against a contemptuous and oppressive aristocracy. Her tragic death at 36 was experienced as a tragedy of universal scope. The Princess of Wales - this was her last official title - indeed represented the alliance of beauty and goodness, both in search for a kind of happiness that would be at the same time illusory, magical and social.

Everyone was aware of her husband's notorious infidelities. Prince Charles of England had concluded a marriage of convenience which did not prevent the continuation of a long-standing relationship with another woman, whose public image was, for barroom philosophers, well below that of Diana.

Everyone also knew of the despise that the princess had to suffer from her in-laws, before, during and after her divorce.

While she could have limited herself in search of a happiness that money, obviously, could not buy, everyone finally appreciated that she devote so much time and grace to the defence of great humanitarian causes, including that of persons crippled because of wars often conducted with the assent and for the enrichment of the ruling classes of which she was a part.

The extreme emotion aroused by the tragic fate of the princess - that of her companion, heir to a huge industrial empire, hardly drew tears - is a *priori* somewhat surprising.

Why did a news item affecting, through an accident attributable to social segregation, personalities

belonging to a caste completely cut off from the *vulgum pecus* affect so much ordinary people living sometimes very far from the United Kingdom in Republics rid of monarchs and aristocrats for a long time, when in fact the so-called upper classes were not overly moved?

By her death, Diana was in short elected to embody the tragic destiny of those revolting against the multiple submissions that the ruling class wants to impose on them. Diana was at the same time Spartacus, Robin Hood, Joan of Arc and Sissi the Empress<sup>84</sup>.

Heroine and victim, the Princess of Wales took rank in the pantheon of martyrs from beggars' revolts. Even though her social milieu knew nothing about poverty, she had become the flagship of the poor – despite the fact that, in the process of marrying a big capital mogul whose family hardly practiced philanthropy, she hardly conceived herself as a proletarian muse.

Alive, Diana probably wouldn't have drawn attention far beyond the circle of gossip fans. Demised, her fate ceased to be hers. She became one of the non-religious saints the working classes sometimes need to invent a future for themselves.

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<sup>84</sup> Spartacus led a rebellion by slaves who almost defeated the Roman armies around 70 BC. Robin Hood was a noble Englishman who took the lead of a peasants' league fighting against unfair taxes and dictatorship of the regent in the XIII<sup>th</sup> century; Joan of Arc was a young lady taking the lead of the French army when it had nearly lost the 100 years' war in the XV<sup>th</sup> century; Sissi was a young lady aristocrat from rural ascent who married the Austrian emperor out of love and resisted the excessively rigid protocol in Vienne during the XIX<sup>th</sup> century.

## XLVIII ALMATY

Kazakhstan is the cradle for the apple.

Not really heaven on earth, nor in the corner of the Hesperides which are rather Berberian<sup>85</sup>. But with a tradition sufficiently anchored to make the tasting of wild fruits an important event of this meeting in Alma Ata "*the mother of apples*".

We are in September, well on the way to confirming my transfer from Geneva to Moscow. Kazakhstan will be part of my portfolio, like all Stans<sup>86</sup> from Central Asia and quite a few other Indo-European pearls occupying the space from Belarus to Georgia. We are only separated from China by a chain of quasi-Himalayan mountains, 天山 Tian Shan, the mountains of the sky.

For this week-long talk on neoliberal developments and their antidotes in Central Asia, I played on post-Soviet influences to obtain a special invitation for the benefit of Rabbit. Her husband is in training somewhere, her parents are still keen to take care of their little girl, she accepts.

Her journey takes place in two stages. Barely independent, Kazakhstan is only a regional destination for China. Stopover at Urumqi, among the Uyghurs, on the other side of the mountains.

The arrival taking place during seminar hours, it is a limousine driver who welcomes her on my behalf. A privilege due to the desire of the national representative to do well, since a few months later I will become his official cacique, sitting in the center of the Empire. The desire to do well, the kindness and a smile devoid of any hypocrisy make the hours of Rabbit-Tiger even sweeter.

We spend the evenings on the terraces of our suites. Separate quarters, appearances saved. We sip port acquired at the last minute at Cointrin duty free, hands entwined facing the horizon of the Alatau, eternal snow up there, sweets with merry melodies down here.

These were four great, four beautiful days.

Everyone in this meeting, those from Geneva, my home, those from her side, there was an official delegation from her organization - its members had the good idea not to ask whose was the name following theirs on the list of participants - she charmed them all with smiles and mysteries from the East.

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<sup>85</sup> Apples play an important role in European legends – in Paradise, God forbade Adam and Eve to eat fruit from apple tree, which they nonetheless did, losing immortality and purity for mankind; one of the twelve labours imposed upon Hercules was to steal apples from Hesperides garden, which was located in Northern Morocco.

<sup>86</sup> "stan" is a Persian language word meaning "country" – the "stans" are notably Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan

During the day, we slip away, and with my young colleague, dark complexion, peach skin, fawn lashes, we take advantage of the official ZIL to savour the moment.

The stay ends without much promise but on the unspoken statement of mutual pleasure. It was the first time that we shared more than hours, more than a night stolen from proper social behaviour.

Her departure for the airport was scheduled at three in the morning. Mine was to follow a hundred and twenty minutes later.

This last night, we drank the stars while finishing our bottle.

I now knew that Rabbit's desire was much more than Karen's regret. I also sensed that with a little consistency we could survive the Soviet separation. There would be no official trip for me to her home over the next five years, no other chance to help her cross Sky Mountains to reach me past the Urals. I didn't tell her - but I knew it.

The Internet weaved our patience to wait ...

## MCMXCVIII THE EURO

The euro was put into circulation in the form of notes and coins on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2002. I had known the franc, the new franc and the renewed franc. Me who still counted in old francs for large sums - a hundred thousand for a house, this sounds like a garden hut; ten million is something else! - here I am again monetarily turned upside down.

The euro had been used for banking transactions since 1999. It was the market rates at 31 December 1998 which calibrated the conversion of the national currencies of the countries which must now use the European unit of account.

It was not the first European attempt to unify currencies. The Latin Union, created in 1865 on the initiative of Napoleon III, had united until the First World War France, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Greece and, later, Spain and the Portugal, then Russia and certain Latin American countries. This noble ambition did not resist the conflict, and it took three quarters of a century to find a European successor.

The idea of creating a common currency for the countries of the European Union was born and is progressing in response to the interests of large companies, anxious to avoid risks and uncertainties linked to diverging monetary policies among trading partners. For some countries, such as France, the creation of the single currency made it possible to acquire the illusion of having a say in a European monetary policy otherwise very strongly dominated by Germany within the framework of common stabilization policies exchange.

The security generated by the common currency had its drawbacks. Not only did States give up pursuing their own monetarist policies through devaluation / revaluation mechanisms, but they also accepted external discipline with safeguards imposed under the influence of German financial institutions, whose leaders feared that a monetary policy which they would consider as risky on the part of certain countries might create

burdens endured but not desired by the economies stamped as "*virtuous*".

These so-called Maastricht criteria, named after the European Treaty establishing the common monetary policy in 1992, very greatly limit the economic and therefore social freedom of the participating States. The latter accept a *de facto* tutelage by the European institutions over whole areas of their decision making in terms of economic and monetary policy.

The "*convergence criteria*" frame the advantages that member countries could expect from a monetary union whose scale and stability would otherwise have enabled access to international credit on particularly favourable terms, thus encouraging increasing debt.

The convergence criteria include limits on inflation - compared to the European average observed -, on the public deficit - 3% of gross domestic product -, on public debt - 60% of GDP -, and on long-term interest rates - compared to those practiced by countries with lower inflation. Since the deficit and debt criteria also account for local authorities and social security, it is practically the whole operation of national redistribution mechanisms which is placed under the supervision of the European institutions. This makes very narrow the room for manoeuvre available to governments whose popular mandate would be to pursue a policy different from the liberal policy prevailing in European circles.

History has shown that the fears aroused in French public opinion by the "*convergence criteria*" were justified. The Maastricht Treaty has only been ratified in France by a slim majority - 51% - but its effects have been fully felt in the socially restrictive policies which have since then followed one after the other.

What in itself could be considered a measure of high symbolic value, the adoption of a common currency as a pledge of lasting peace and continental unity, will therefore ultimately have contributed to the disaffection and disenchantment towards European institutions whose demands are increasingly seen as antagonistic to the aspiration to social progress of the peoples composing the Union.

## XLIX MOSCOW

Moscow could have been a renaissance. All the odds were in favour: for Monique, a cultural context familiar to her with the Russian language and some more or less recent friends allowing her to build a network; for me, an area of responsibility much wider than usual, with ten countries to cover, a real multinational team to manage as well as a flattering reputation as a pro-Soviet sympathizer that still opened many more doors than one would think. For both of us, freedom from ghosts. Karen was far behind, Rabbit was not threatening anyone. The distance in the proximity, barely a few hours of flight, French television via satellite, Internet, Usenet and all \* nets every hour of the day and night.

It had been more than twenty years since we had been alone by ourselves.

Gwenaël built his life and his career, Madenn explored the possibilities and found the way. Only Ning-Ning, the Chinese dog, was our link to the days before.

I have, frankly, hardly a vivid memory of our homelife. Cohabitation had to build up in daily life purring. On working days, the metro brought me back from Kitai Gorod, the Chinese city, premonition by station name, to Prospekt Mira, Peace avenue, station just at the bottom of our building former collective converted bourgeois. Sometimes it was the bus, with in winter, at night, the permanent risk of missing the station, the frost on the windows, inside and outside so mitigating the thin glow of the street lights that only the time passed and the number of stops allowed to estimate when having reached the desired destination.

Dinner for two alone in front of French speaking TV5 or in a local cellar, these underground restaurants little frequented by ex-Soviet citizens for whom the wanderings of an alcoholic president surrounded by greedy Mafiosi did not stop prolonging the downfall. Wages did not follow the vertiginous devaluation of the rubble, banishing the locals from access to menus which prices were displayed in Currency Units, disguised dollars.

After dinner, I isolated myself in front of the computer. I walked through the meanders of thematic discussion groups that foreshadowed Facebook, What's App and other Twitter. Languages, history, geography, literature, poetry, social sciences, legislation, conspiracies, shouting, games, abuse, various ... There were hundreds, these groups with free access and free speech where we, the happy few equipped, met, crossed paths, quarrelled and shared so many hours, words and bandwidth. Usenet's great hours. Some intangible friends of these binary years remains in my contacts.

I also drank, less than Boris Yeltsin but sometimes more than I should have. A Geneva ultrasound system having found my liver was quite fatty, I had made the wise decision to banish whisky and wine from my daily distillate. Wise, but unreasonable. I reached weaning all the more easily because I convinced myself that due to its crystallinity, vodka could not be considered a harmful alcohol in the same way as malt or grape products.

Wrong decision. Anyway I did not have too much shame to doze off some afternoons in the lair of the office or even between the sheets of a neighbouring hotel where I had thought it best to stagger. These turpitudes, fortunately, were not chronic enough to lose my reputation - at least I had no echo, hierarchical or friendly. Monique attended the theatre, a French-speaking Russian troupe from central Moscow. She also provided support and singing lessons to Slavic students of an internationally inclined school and allowed herself to age.

On Sunday, we brunched. Round trip on foot by all degrees of frost to a Sheraton not too far away where a magician officiated next to fountains of Crimean sparkling wines. We received a little, sometimes visited others' homes. The girls and their companions went to see us, variously enjoying the surprises of the place. Ning Ning went to the empyrean of the dogs, Monique saved Lyetta from the throes of abandonment.

Life unfolded all the more serenely as I had good enough on my plate when I languished after a little less routine, with the excitement of missions to the four corners of the empire. Ten countries, one of which is so multiple! A team to explore the bitter confines, I travelled at leisure to the best of the steppe.

I then rediscovered, at the detour of travel, the concomitant joys of a multipolar seduction. Olga, Nathalie, Natasha - I found myself a man with women, relying without false shame on the advantages of the function to keep the midday brandies alive.

Natasha, Nathalie, Olga - we knew how to live then, at the doorstep of the Kremlin.



**MCMXCIX**  
**THE SUN IS DEAD**

Late morning in summer. Kermorvan half asleep like a lizard. Birds share with each other their joy out of ambient sweetness. All of a sudden though, night wins just before noon, and the cold that spreads.

August 11, 1999. The total solar eclipse mobilizes the attention of a good part of the populations of Western Europe, then of Central Europe and part of the Middle East, before passing out in the Bay of Bengal.

The phenomenon was in reality extremely temporary, since at a given point it was observable only during one to two minutes, crossing France from East to West in a little less than a quarter of an hour.

This eclipse nevertheless aroused an extraordinary enthusiasm which is explained by the fact that the eclipse crossed densely populated regions at one hour - around noon - and a period of the year - summer holidays - where an audience likely to be interested was outside, and available.

During the duration of the eclipse, it was dark in the middle of the day, animals went silent, especially the birds, and the temperature dropped significantly. The gradual return of luminosity and life after only a few seconds was felt as a relief by the participants who were not mobilized by scientific observations but were caught in the middle of their daily tasks.

Total solar eclipses are not exceptional phenomena. There were 77 of them during the XX<sup>th</sup> century, and the same number is expected during the XXI<sup>th</sup> century (including the eclipses called "hybrid" that is to say perceived as total from certain points, and as annular from other points on the globe). What makes the show rare and successful is the fact that any eclipse is only visible on a particular route. Thus, for the south of England where the eclipse of 1999 began to be visible, the previous occurrence of such a phenomenon dated from 1927, more than 70 years before.

Solar eclipses have therefore always occupied a special place in the collective unconscious - with, one can

easily imagine, a particularly strong impact in times when their prediction was not possible.

The occultation of the sun by the moon occurs without any warning signal but the anteriority analysis allowed to anticipate the occurrence of an eclipse based on cyclical theory like that of "saros" corresponding to the duration of 223 lunar months after which the three stars concerned return to their initial position.

However, the eclipse will not occur at the same longitudes - there will be a third of a day's difference - and it takes an average of 370 years for the shadow of the moon to pass a second time at the same place on Earth's crust.

Mathematics for eclipse prediction are therefore particularly complex. One remembers the remarkable effect produced on the Incas by the eclipse which they believe was ordered by Tintin in the publication *"Temple of the Sun"*. Among the other historically famous eclipses, there is that of 1207 BC, to which the Old Testament refers by writing that God stopped the course of the sun at the request of Joshua, or, much more recently, that which occurred in 1879, during a Zulu victory over the British troops.

The Sun tends to grow, and the Moon to move away from the Earth. There will therefore be no total solar eclipse anymore in about 600 million years. Until then, there is no doubt that those occurring will continue to fuel the imagination of the people.

## L FIFTY YEARS

Very small, I was aware that the year of my fiftieth birthday would coincide with that of the millennium. A perspective at that time both distant and exciting which, when nearing by, became more trivial. The deadline was there. Turned the year 2000, no way to avoid the turning of the fifties.

Russians love symbols, the parties and celebrations. My jubilee lived up to their reputation. Under the splendours of one of the palaces of the Ministry of Labour, tripartite festivities with personalities, gifts, speeches, the crowd of the officials from the world of work duly represented. Things had been taken in hand by Sviatoslav - a friend of more than twenty years, we had shared the same Geneva office for a few seasons -, by Monique and by my colleagues keeping their intentions secret almost until the last moment.

Nothing very intimate, but a little bit of pride all the same, since so many people paid so much attention to what, in fact, was only a sheet turned on my ephemeris.

The year of the fiftieth birthday was therefore that of the consecrations. There were the tripartite golds, but there was also the renaissance of seduction, to fortunately counterbalance the sticky weight of the candles.

Olga was the first. Employed by a sister organisation, bilingual, intrepid and mother of three children, she became evident to me one afternoon in March. In honour of the international women's day, excessive drinking with the team. I secretly flee to the nearby Marriott Hotel to hide the shame of a missed drinking party - I already no longer had the capacity required to compete with Russian.

Once sheltered in the freshness of four-star sheets, a call to Olga the Maternal, who had assured me of her full dedication. By dint of stubborn gibberish, I convince her to join me. Otherwise, it would have been the incessant harassment of an incorrigible drunkard. I fall quietly asleep while she holds my hand. Waking up at night, noting that he was absent and marrying back since nothing had been done.

Olga must have felt sorry for the weak. It broke no bridge, and we were soon able to conclude what I had not been able to begin. There was the Budapest hotel, less expensive and more discreet, Kazan, Petersburg. Olga was welcoming - and loyal.

Then was Natasha, the Belarus. The one who made me decree that Minsk was the most beautiful city in the empire. We discovered each other in summer, during the official signing ceremony of a cooperation program of

which she was a key and I a signatory. With the seals affixed, our hosts offered picnics and excursions. Natasha was the only representative of another ministry, no hierarchical fear of a shady eyebrow.

The vodka had warmed our lobes and activated the pheromones. Was it chance alone that made us visit side by side? We played hands and fingers along a scenic route.

Natasha only speaks local, my Russian is what it is - no time wasted on gossip. My missions to Minsk have multiplied with, like a trophy, a work by Rimashevski<sup>87</sup> chosen together on each occasion, as a sweet memory. It was charming, extended to Kiev, Geneva, until the last return, not a tear from her when I leave at the end of my last visit, tomorrow I will repatriate to Switzerland. Natasha knows how to behave...

Fifteen years later, beautiful hiatus, we rediscovered each other through these so-called social networks. An appointment in Istanbul - no visa required - then Minsk again. Natasha still young, and me too ambitious. I wanted to follow her skating, fancying myself as an ephebes until the clumsiness of an icy fall. Double shame, double fracture. The misstep brought me back to the path of reason. Rabbit is enough for my happiness, Natasha did not forgive it.

Finally there was Nathalie. Too beautiful, too hieratic, too victim of harassment from a Geneva small-time boss capitalizing on sexual intercourse the terms of a contract. I knew how to put an end to it, authority made law. Nathalie thanked me ...

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<sup>87</sup> Igor Rimashevski is a contemporary Belarusian naïve painter  
[http://www.bellabelarus.com/en/component/option,com\\_jsgallery/mode,by\\_artist/artist\\_id,49/Itemid,49/](http://www.bellabelarus.com/en/component/option,com_jsgallery/mode,by_artist/artist_id,49/Itemid,49/)

MM  
Y2K

My IT practice had dramatically improved since the Gabonese ZX and the Beijing Gopher. In Moscow I trusted this very young retired officer of the Red Army freshly recycled as a resident computer specialist. The bug of the year 2000 would not go passed him!

The difficulties foreseen for the change of computer century were inherited from the technology of data storage on expensive supports and limited capacities.

On the night of December 31, 1999, the date change would bring the counters back to the year 1900, the change from 99 to 00 for the date field corresponding to the years 19 + 99 and 19 + 00 respectively - such feedback could effectively lead to blockages and errors in numbers wherever the date would generate programmatic actions.

In the 1960s, the loading of data into computers was effected by so-called punched cards, each of which only had 80 columns, using a technique inherited from the 18th century weaving machines.

In this format of imposed length, the treatment of the figures like text did not allow to allocate 4 characters to the years. Even if the punched cards were replaced by magnetic tapes in the 1970s, the practice of only allocating two positions for the years was retained in the new programs, which made transition easy from one technique storage to another.

The risks inherent to this practice appeared in the 1980s. It was then necessary to resort to specific devices to allow for the long-term simulation of operations, for example financial, with the need to construct loan amortization tables straddling the limit between two centuries. However, it was only a few years before the fatal data of 12.31.99 that the international community became fully aware of the risks of chain malfunctions.

Between 1995 and 1998, Governments have gradually become aware of the problem and have implemented techniques designed to alleviate foreseeable

difficulties. The IT specialists were then mobilized to either ensure the transfer of data and applications to new systems not dependent on the transition to the year 2000 - "*migration*" - or to put in place fixes to existing systems - "*conversion*".

Internet, then an emerging technique based on a coding system not dependent on previous limitations, played a major role in raising public awareness and in coordinating the efforts of the international scientific community.

Ultimately, and even if most of the computer technicians spent a sleepless night at the bedside of their programs, the transition to the year 2000 - Y2K in American jargon - took place without major incident.

This augurs well for future difficulties for certain UNIX systems. Designed to prevent the malfunction of 2000, those count time in seconds since 1<sup>st</sup> January 1970. They devote 32 bits to the date, which leads to a deadline of Jan. 19, 2038 i.e. ( $2^{31} - 1$ ) or 2,147,483,647 seconds later.

Another second later, in the absence of any corrective, the date displayed would become December 13, 1901 (roughly 2,147,483,647 seconds before 1<sup>st</sup> January 1970).

Using another timestamp system called 64-bit will provide some leeway, since the deadline will occur  $2^{63} - 1$  seconds after time zero, i.e. for a start on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1970 a date of December 4, year 292,277,026, 596, which will not happen soon.

Vertigo of binary!

## LI YOU GIRLS

The hive was growing. Both Madenn and Gwenaël cemented their cells. Not necessarily very successful on the first draft, the walls of the first cells tended to go sideways.

We were certainly not intervening parents. The distance meant that, had we articulated them, our tutelary words would not have carried far. The information about girls' social progress was provided under the cover of holidays. We got to know a name by chance from a phone call. To be honest, their mother got the knowledge, she then passed on the information to me when my ear was present and vaguely attentive.

There were physical encounters with putative sons-in-law, whose persisting silence made me grump the doubts aroused from inadequacy. Such, from whom I only keep the memory of his mutic flabbiness on Kermorvan's sofa, did not survive academic shortcomings diverting him from the medical field. For another, acne-stricken and still adherent to his mother, his suburban bland stifled Celtic desires - all he left us to share was a used condom under the parental bed.

And then one day, almost without notice, the right choice is announced - the one they think, rightly or wrongly, that he will sustain time and be solid. Moscow hosted the two recent couples.

Madenn had chosen in the rural neighbourhood, most antagonistic to the capital where she could not acclimatize, too vertical, too bristling, too convoying. As soon as she made her choice, she fled from the suburbs to a nest in the village with Cyrille, an old tenderness from the nursery class that she had briefly attended in Gabon-Switzerland hinge.

Gwenaël also chooses a fellow student, but the bridge is established at the upper level. Chance, again, is linked with expatriation. With parents exiled in Beijing Gwenaël could not claim to attend Lemanic humanities. So it was Lyon, which allowed for a semblance of chaperoning from Geneva on the part of benevolent friends. Lyon where she let herself be taken in by the local accent that Guillaume is perpetuating.

As much as I imagined Cyrille, knowing the village and what it generated, I was very much ignorant of Beaujolais circumstances.

My first acquaintance was from a distance. I was on a mission to Geneva, Gwenaël had joined me, I accompanied her back by rental car to the old capital of Gaul. Two silents in the same carriage over 170 kilometres, this was likely to drag on. As I had just spent a week of training for senior executives, intended to make us aware of the subtleties of our respective

personalities, I convinced her, for time to pass, to go through the same test, then to impose it by phone to my putative son-in-law.

The answers given, the grid decrypted, I couldn't help but blink. The temperament of the Lyon's stepson was point by point opposite to mine - introverted, extroverted; intuitive instead of sensitive; logic against feeling; decision-maker when the other refuses to close the field of possibilities. Complementarity of the architect with the craftsman...

The Moscow visits made it possible to confirm the choices.

Contrary as they were, the sons-in-law did not display any more significant differences than those distinguishing the two sisters. Since then, Guillaume survived, Cyrille was dismissed. As for the girls, they always interlock, proof if it was necessary that to blossom the sorority does not require exemplarity on the paternal side.



## MMI

### WIKIPEDIA

As a child, I dreamed of a world where my parents could have made a whole switchboard of knowledge explorers available for my own benefit. Obviously I delighted myself with all types of search engines, Altavista, Lycos, and finally Google. But the real qualitative leap was Wikipedia.

The French-language Wikipedia edition was established on March 23, 2001. It reached one million articles in 2010, and two million in 2018.

Wikipedia in French is the 5th largest linguistic edition by number of articles after English, followed by Cebuano (Philippines), Swedish and German. In terms of consultation, the French language edition is sixth for page views, behind English, Spanish, Japanese, German and Russian, fourth for the number of visitors after English, Russian and Portuguese. In 2018, there were more than 30 million connections in France to one of the pages of the French Wikipedia edition, compared to 15 million in 2011. It is therefore an understatement to say that this tool has become an instrument of mass culture with a hitherto unequalled influence and outreach.

Wikipedia is not the first example of an encyclopaedic compilation of knowledge designed to be available for as many people as possible. As early as in 1674, a Great Historical dictionary was published in Lyon. In 1728, a Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences or Cyclopaedia<sup>88</sup> was published in London. The ambition of its translation into French gave rise to the publication of the Encyclopaedia by Diderot and d'Alembert, much more comprehensive, and already a collective work.

Technical progress allowed over the years to improve the quality of the "*Encyclopaedia-type products*" including in a very accessible ("*Quid*") or

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<sup>88</sup> From ancient Greek kuklios (circle) and paideia (instruction), cyclopaedia goes around all the sciences.

dematerialized format ("*SVP 11.11*")<sup>89</sup>, without however achieving the exceptional characteristics of the Wikipedia project. Universal, collaborative, without prerequisites for volunteers if not to comply with relatively simple technical standards, updated practically in real time, free and accessible by all, at all times, on a wide variety of supports.

The Wikipedia project certainly arouses criticism up to its ambitions. It is particularly criticized for uploading partial or biased approaches on controversial topics, which is why some governments object to citizens accessing its contents. Some, sometimes the same, criticize Wikipedia for providing everyone with free access to confidential or secret information. The military hierarchy, for example, sometimes dislikes certain disclosures about its facilities or practices.

In any case, the mass nature of the project opens the way to certain errors of assessment or certain approximations. To stick to the French language, the 125,000 past or present contributors are certainly not all without any hidden agenda. However, each of the 300 to 400 articles created each day is subject to around fifty revisions, while an elite board of less than a thousand people contributes on average more than 100 times in the month.

The Wikipedia France project is legally placed under the responsibility of an associative structure established in 2004 which has less than a dozen employees for some 500 members and *de facto* guarantees the proper functioning of the whole.

As such, in their coherence and their incredible openings, the 287 linguistic chapters of Wikipedia represent an access to universal knowledge of which nobody could have dreamed including during the second half of the twentieth century.

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<sup>89</sup> *Quid* was a French encyclopedia published annually between 1963 and 2007. The presentation was very compressed, and abbreviations were used extensively in telegraph style. It used very thin paper to get all the information into one volume. *SVP* was a service society created in France in 1935. Through the dedicated phone number SVP 11 11, subscribers could ask any academic question and get a documented answer within minutes. This service was discontinued in the late 1970s.

What is more, it is an entirely new type of cultural tool, based on everyone's contribution, free for sharing without having to require anyone's approval.

LII

GENEVA ONCE MORE

The Moscow episode came to an end in September 2001. While, caviar and vodka, I celebrate at Kremlin's foothill both my departure and the arrival of my successor, Monique is looking for a cottage through the Pays de Gex. She is my advanced scout.

The evening of final libations, I was already looking forward to the promises by Olga who was to join me after midnight in the room of the Budapest hotel, which Cerberus she knew how to circumvent. Whisper in my ear - my wife is asking for me on the ground floor. I hiccup like the villain caught red-handed, I betray myself by asking which of my spouses, before realizing that the expectation is on the telephone. Monique fell in love with an apartment on the outskirts of Voltaire and wanted my approval to conclude. It is therefore with the peaceful mind of the owner that I too concluded, later that night, with Olga.

For this new Geneva stay, we are the owners. We had to negotiate some cash.

Banks are demanding - not so much for interest yield, the market is buoyant, as for security. They need to be reassured that my blood is immune from HIV. I fear the result because since Gabon my consumption habits have hardly changed. I have never been able to hold the distance while imprisoned in a condom. Not that I consume often, but when I do, it is without precaution.

Terms are what they are; to be able to buy, you have to test. The operation takes place in the discretion of the company medical service, eight days to wait. A result which I ultimately refuse to take note of, to the surprise of the consultant practitioner handing me the sealed envelope: our Mutual Fund, I have learned in the meantime, is full of cash which it lends without any other guarantee than that of the rights to a future pension. No need to go viral to purchase!

It was only fifteen years later that I had to confirm my non-HIV contamination - there is no mutual insurance for residence in China, I had to go to the end of the analysis.

For the time being, Geneva, new duties that hoist me to the pinnacle. Senior official, diplomatic corps, permanent tax refund, an office of ministerial size, in short, not much to do except to supervise.

So back to union responsibilities, combined with bureaucratic daily life. I have so many caps that no one can say, precisely, which one I wear and where I wear it at any given time. No need for two pairs of glasses or two jackets to lure the layman. President of the Trade Union and social protection guru, each of me has a private room, a secretariat, a vacation account, a budget to manage and a lot of imagination.

Rabbit and I had been weaned from physical contact during the last half-decade, but circumstances allow us to catch up. She accompanies me to union sessions organized by a particularly active international federation, we will be frolicking in New York, Vienna, Montreal. I join her in the periodic training that her organization has invited her to from Washington to Bangkok, via Shanghai.

Farewell Olga, Natasha, Nathalie. No more need to sniff around Geneva to flush out some local promise or reconnect with broken antiques. My future, I know, will be rabbit.

Between two banters, I stretch, my back to the fire and my stomach at the table. Life smiles at me. Until diabetes finally diagnosed after years of bamboo that diverts me from alcohol and degreases my body.

Everything is ready to finally bounce!

## MMII

### SARS

SARS was a kind of nightmare. Not that the epidemic was particularly severe or exported from China. There was only one Western victim in China, but fate meant that he was a colleague, whose eulogy I had to pronounce, as Union chair, in front of his widow and children. Then, during the three months of core epidemic, only drop-by-drop news from a Rabbit at risk of infection.

Severe acute respiratory syndrome SARS appeared in Hong Kong in November 2002, on the ninth floor of a large hotel. A previously unknown or little known virus was identified as responsible for a rapidly spreading disease. However, it was only after a few months, in March 2003, that the World Health Organization launched a global alert about it.

The epidemic is considered to have been contained in July 2003, a minor replica being recorded in September 2003 in Singapore apparently due to poor containment of the virus in the laboratory. The first episode will have involved around thirty countries and territories, with 650 dead for 8300 cases identified. China and Hong Kong paid the heaviest toll with 7,500 cases and 550 deaths.

SARS thrives in densely populated areas when future victims are closely exposed to excretions from infected people. This prerequisite explains that the virus did not develop at an extremely rapid pace, in contrast with for example influenza viruses which can very quickly make millions of victims worldwide. In the first reports transmitted to the WHO in February 2003, a high proportion of those affected (30%) were indeed hospital staff in contact with the sick.

In late 2019 - early 2020 a new major epidemic episode appeared in China, attributed to a consumer animal market in a large industrial city in the Southwest. This alert quickly led to exceptional measures of individual protection and collective

isolation in China to limit the transmission of the virus.

This new episode involved there during the first 15 days of epidemiological control nearly 32,000 confirmed cases including 5,000 people in critical condition and more than 600 deaths.

In the end, what became COVID-19 will have shortened 5,000 lives in China. An estimated 600,000 worldwide deaths are attributable - a big drop in the ocean of 60 million deaths a year.

If the 2003 episode of SARS as the episode 2020 of the "*Wuhan coronavirus*" may appear as a limited or even low overall impact in terms of both infected people and mortality, it should however be noted that this relative circumscription is largely due to the exceptional protection measures that have been taken.

Unlike the flu, against which certain treatments have a high success rate, there is no yet known remedy to be applied with a reasonable chance of success to this new type of virus. Another factor of concern is the fact that, unlike seasonal flu, coronavirus-like viruses can be rife without interruption, their effects adding to those of other diseases. In addition, they affect under poorly understood conditions a wide range of people, uncertainty in this area adding to concern about the disease.

According to the WHO, SARS was a "*mysterious, enigmatic and disturbing disease*". Its 2020 avatar is at least as much as the above.

The fact that these epidemics first spread along national and international communication channels contributes to increasing the fear they arouse in a globalized world which they paralyze and fragment. Beyond the epidemiological consequences of these episodes, their consequences on the social behaviours and lifestyles of the populations therefore constitute factors of uncertainty and potential threats to peace and fraternity.

Méliste (Melissa) was born in October 2002. She was the first of a quintet of grand-children, three on the senior side and two on the younger, sometimes doubled with stepfamily. Then followed from the elder side Myrtille (Blueberry) on the eve of spring 2006, from younger side Lenaig (small Elena) in the middle of the summer of that same year and Killian (small smart) in May 2009, return of seniority with Mauve (Malva) a little after 2013 Pentecostal.

If I can be so precise, it is thanks to the web pages that I hastened to design and upload as soon as I received the perinatal pictures.

I undoubtedly needed these creations which nobody in reality never cared about to actually fancy me as an ancestor. My grandfather's fibre seems to lack even more from me than the father's one. I am definitely not a weaver at heart.

Monique knew how to do it better. In her own way, which combined outings, treats, drawings and computer time sharing, she never hesitated to welcome and pamper the available children. As for me, I always had, to evade attention, the excuse of expatriation with its myriad of responsibilities.

I am not sure why I am so wary of effusions. I have kept the sweetest memories of Pèpère and Mémère. All in all, the two girls, I'm pretty proud of them, and their children, well, they are loved and deserve it.

Perhaps it is the fear of getting bogged down in cuddles endangering by too close ties the freedom to choose other paths? If this was the unspoken strategy, the failure is obvious. I will have grumbled for nothing; the bear did not dare to abandon its cave when scents from elsewhere had lured it away from its doorstep.

Or then, on the contrary, the disappointed impatience to find in each of her and in him what I would like to see that I could not carry out? Melissa should be the greatest sinologist, Blueberry the greatest athletic, Lenaig the greatest artist, Killian the greatest intellectual, Malva the sweetest malva. All of them aspiring to the summits, I would have waited for them to help them climb, me who did not know how to ascend. But no one required this fallible hand.

The umbilical explanation of distancing would probably be worth dwelling upon - provided of course that it matters to anyone.

Because the most delicate part, with these relationships which do not cease not being, is that they hardly motivate the generations of downstream. The

chaotic, bloated, bulimic access to the knowledge and experience that technique allows makes useless any recourse to the elderly.

Those who were models become testimony to planned obsolescence, strangers to the mysteries of the global virtual, obstacles to the freedom to snapchat around.

It is probably very late for me to jump on the train to modernity. But you never know, this chapter could catch the eye of the conveyors, slow down for a tiny little while their merciless march, so that I can insert into what they now use as a locomotive-tender a few lines of code anointed with my memory ...



**MMIII**  
**SADDAM**

Pride of being French, when listening to the admonition of Dominique de Villepin<sup>90</sup> at the Security Council of February 14, 2003. *"In this temple of the United Nations, we are the guardians of an ideal, we are the guardians of a conscience"* The speaker was applauded, which hardly ever occurs in such an enclosure. But the hawks did not care.

On March 20, 2003, the American government launched Operation Iraqi Freedom to overthrow the government in power in Baghdad. This campaign is being waged on the basis of allegations since then recognized as false, against the advice of the United Nations, with the sole support of the United Kingdom and Australia. The offensive launched from the territory of Kuwait rests on the massive use of very powerful land and air weapons. The Iraqi army is unable to resist it. The Iraqi government disappears in early April. President Saddam Hussein was finally uncovered in December 2003. He was sentenced to death by a special court for one episode among others of his presidency and executed about a year after his capture.

The American intervention around Iraq is in line with a constant policy aimed at controlling energy resources, particularly with regard to the oil-producing countries. This very intervention could be considered as foreseeable since, in 1970, Saddam Hussein, in the functions which were then his, had launched a program of nationalization of the very important petroleum resources of his country. This interventionist logic had previously concerned Iran and its Prime Minister Mossadegh, it will continue against Venezuela and its presidents Chavez and Maduro.

The hegemonic will of the United States also extends to countries which, without detaining major energy resources, may influence American supply security and

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<sup>90</sup> Dominique de Villepin is a French right-wing politician borne in 1953. He was Secretary General to the Presidency, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of the Interior then Prime Minister under Jacques Chirac's two presidential terms. He became world famous when brilliantly opposing in the name of France the US invasion of Iraq during the 14 Feb.2003 session of the UN Security council.

exert control over these resources due to their location.

This search for domination, commonly called "*American imperialism*", finds its historical source in the 15th century with the discovery and then the colonization of the new continent.

For the dominant castes, it is a question of strengthening and sacralising their power by recovering for their benefit the maximum of wealth on which this power is relying, and by eliminating, including through force, any risk of ideological, political or economic questioning.

This vocation for global interventionism cannot develop as abruptly and openly in a world where historical evolution has brought about the progressive emergence of universal rules of good conduct.

American policy therefore develops in a context of paradoxical alliances, considered as necessary steps to reach the ultimate goal, alliances which ultimately generate other conflicts and contradictions.

Thus, the United States had helped to strengthen the power and regional ambitions of Saddam Hussein when he was considered untouchable in the context of the Cold War and the Soviet protectorate. Saddam then represented a potential ally to counter third-party ambitions, notably Iranian, seen as shorter-term threats by American strategists. With the impression of dangerousness shifting as the influence of USSR as a guarantor country was weakened, Iraq went from being a partner by reason to becoming an obstacle in an obstinate quest for domination.

*Mutatis mutandis*, this same interventionist spiral - alliances and reversal of alliances in a context of permanent conflict - is found in Afghanistan or in other regions of the Near and Middle East, without lessons being drawn by the forces motivating and stirring up this policy of permanent conflict from the dramatic consequences of their national (Indian wars, American Civil War) or international (Cuba, Mexico, China, Vietnam, Korea) failures.

To use Noam Chomsky's<sup>91</sup> expression, the United States has become "*an empire in denial, suffering from historical amnesia*".

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<sup>91</sup> Avram Noam Chomsky (born December 7, 1928) is an American linguist and political activist. Sometimes called "*the father of modern linguistics*", Chomsky is also a major figure in analytic philosophy and one of the founders of the field of cognitive science. His ideas are highly influential in the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movements

## LIV PRESIDENT

Sinecure is the distinguishing feature of the senior official, whether national or international. With age and its scars, temptations and frivolities become rarer. The late discovery of diabetes limits the use of good food excesses the slow alcoholic digestion of which no longer shortened the perception of time between two libations. Visits to Rabbit are not enough to fill the free time, I feel blue.

Professional relations had deteriorated sharply between a new Director general and a Union that had inadvertently fallen under the yoke of a clique more anxious to appear than to negotiate.

A few months after my return from Moscow, renewal of leadership. An opportunity to seize to get alleviate boredom under the harness. Karen is not in the game; she pursues her career path and strives to be a good mother. I build a victorious team with one of the rare colleagues who also had real life experience of activism. Pierre was a Swiss Maoist, a union member and a worker before joining the banner of the United Nations.

So here we are in business. I have all my options opened. Diplomacy, which has its advantages. The administration of our Pension Fund, which is worth a few trips. The house union, very convenient cover when I want to breathe my feelings out. The worldwide federation of staff representations, the Francophonie that I defend and sublimate in an international Geneva from which English wants to oust all linguistic competition.

A little exhilaration mingling with the real greats of this world, Abdou Diouf, Boutros Boutros Ghali, Perez de Cuellar, Kofi Annan, Somavia, Seguin, Chotard, Blondel<sup>92</sup>, I go after them, I answer their requests, I tickle them, I apostrophe, I whisper in their ears, under one cap or the other.

Adrenaline too, at the bend of a negotiation that could overturn, in the face of an opposition that covets the caliphate. Defend such a person in the dismissal court, such another on the medical board, drafting beautiful agreements, hatching noble plots. Between two militant flashes, co-writing pamphlets for, thanks to a signature, getting a guaranteed seat in the social security pantheon.

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<sup>92</sup> Abdou Diouf, former president of Senegal and Secretary general of the Francophonie international organisation. Boutros Ghali, Perez de Cuellar, Kofi Annan, secretary generals of the United Nations. Somavia, Director general of the ILO. Seguin, former French prime Minister, French representative at the ILO. Chotard, former head of French employers, French representative at the ILO. Blondel, former Secretary general of Workers' Strength Union (F.O.), member of the ILO Governing body.

Those first years of my fifties carried me high. They saw me hover in nonchalant circles, waiting without saying for a chance to dive, and by well-seized prey be sustained enough for a new ascent. Higher still, but under what skies, up to what altitude?

My goal then was the Newfound Rabbit. I thought twice that I had identified the right corridor. A transfer to Bangkok with, among the fields that I would have to plough, those where she was frolicking. An easy prey that I dropped for the shadow of a project to be carried out far closer, Beijing itself and for five years.

Monique knew nothing about this intention, which hardly included her.

When the time came, I would have exchanged my lonely departure for promises of frequent return trips. A friend put the cat out of the bag between the dessert and the cheese plate, on a weekend dinner. I just had time to improvise a complicated smokescreen - I would leave without leaving while staying - before the verdict fell: our offer had not been accepted.

So here I am with my defeated hope, forced to seek across other pastures the so desired key to rabbit space.

## MMIV FACEBOOK

I am not a frantic user of Facebook, for which I signed up in 2009, seeing in it a substitute for the Usenet years which themselves marked the beginnings of home connectivity. I cap at three hundred contacts, I publish photos that I deem artistic, I strive to keep style and distance when I enter into a controversy, I preserve relationships between two greeting cards. In short, I am an ordinary user, without enthusiasm or false modesty.

Mark Zuckerberg was twenty years old when, with a few fellow students from Harvard University, he founded the Facebook network intended, as the name suggests, to make the university's directory look more dynamic.

Facebook first spread to other American universities before becoming accessible to everyone in 2006. Less than 15 years later, it is the third most visited site - after Google and YouTube - and has more than 2 billion registered users.

Like many great ideas, the one that presided over the success of Facebook is very simple: it is about providing users with a virtual space specific to them, where to store images and reflections that they can then share with all those to whom they wish to provide access, subject to reciprocity.

Like many seemingly simple achievements, Facebook survives through a multitude of complex procedures. It is not so much a question of "uploading" photos and documents, a technique mastered well before 2004, but of guaranteeing IT security, legal protection, ownership control, adaptation to different cultures, storage of data, speed of flow, etc., all of which requires the implementation of considerable material, logistical and human resources that must be mobilized while respecting the principles of freedom and universality which are, in a way, the website's trademark.

Given its size and its mode of operation (publication and retransmission without ex ante moderation), Facebook can be a privileged vehicle for the

propagation of false news and for attempts to format public opinion.

Some governments have viewed this as an unacceptable social risk. They then implemented a blocking of the site on national servers. Because of its potential universality, the content of some Facebook pages can be considered as violating certain regulatory moral criteria in given countries, while this same content is perfectly accepted, even usual in others.

These differences do not only concern the religious fact or the oppositions between agnostics and believers. The offense may look trivial for some, perfectly intolerable for others. For example, while the representation of nudity is common in Europe, in the United States the sight of a breast or a penis will offend the prudishness shaping social relationships.

The question therefore arises of a national approach to abusive content, the preservation of an overall freedom of expression requiring the re-establishment of a particular censorship.

For the greatest number of its users, Facebook is just a means of making or maintaining contact with acquaintances, or acquaintances of acquaintances.

The interactive nature of the network therefore remains essential. The reactions of sympathy, empathy and even aversion that develop there have little equivalent in "real life", be it because the size of the circle of people concerned or the freedom of tone and the variety of themes. This strength and this vitality can obviously lead to difficult situations, for individuals whose acrimony or virtual exaltation do not find a real outlet in line with the circumstances that caused them.

Facebook employed 45,000 people in 2019. Its turnover, generated mainly from advertising, was US \$ 71 billion. There were 37 million active users in France.

## LV RABBIT FUTURE

The Moscow episode could have killed pro-Rabbit expectations, since so rare were our physical opportunities over these years.

To tell the truth, the only flows exchanged were epistolary. Pierre tried well to act as inviting power for obtaining a rabbit visa during one of my visits to Geneva, but his request suffered from the bureaucratic slowness of the consular authorities.

I was a little apprehensive about our reunion, planned on American soil, during a council where I represented the Geneva crowds. Her employer sitting across the Atlantic, Rabbit had a long-term visa which she used. We had synchronized our arrivals and our airports. I had to wait for her after the security checks, barely for an hour. Perfect plan if ever there was one!

The plan was defeated by the vigilance of the JFK patrols. My prolonged stay near the deserted luggage belts was considered suspicious, and I was expelled from the room without any possibility to discuss or to warn. SMS roaming was not yet in place at that time, connecting a French mobile phone with a Chinese one in a New York airport was then mission impossible.

Lost in the vastness of the great hall, I waited, spinning around, trying to find on the boards a sign of the arrival of a Pekingese flight, listening to the exchanges of vaguely Asian groups, in search of mandarin tones. Failure, vain expectation - Rabbit will have stood me up, last moment shy to take the plunge, like me, formerly, it was before Moscow, let her cool her feet after a very last moment cancelling of an excursion from Bangkok.

Tit for tat, myself to blame. Back at the hotel, someone knocks at the door, has to be room service, see her in the doorway, half furious at not having been awaited, but for the most half part so relieved of her to be found...

With Rabbit, we crossed many furrows across the world, these years of multiple caps. We were New Yorker, Federal, Thai, Quebecer, Austrian, Lisboans, Parisian and of course Pekingese.

Four tools to keep the memories of these interlude delights.

The first was blogs, which began to offer free pages to separated lovers. I related in English, day after day, one chapter after another, the relationship of our American adventures. I have kept these creations in a format that survives the obsolescence of the original medium<sup>93</sup>. I reread them sometimes, tears in my eyes and warmth in my heart.

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<sup>93</sup> See *Ten Days' Wonders* and *Shanbuluke*, both appended to this review



Then, the e-mails, also daily, voluble, full of promises, of expectations, of desires, sometimes forming sequences written in advance and scheduled for delayed delivery when a mission brought me to unconnected land. These were digested by the updates of the Geneva server, but Rabbit kept them in the form of archive discs which may or may not still be readable.

There was Skype, which was just starting. At the time, we marvelled at sharing time with six million other users. The contact was as long and frequent as possible - writing, listening, whispering, the walls have ears. Finally, photo storage, a rented space on P-Base website. The Rabbit-Tiger page is still there. Occasionally, I renew the lease. One hundred and six "*galleries*", one per event, and 4,000 images.

Not to forget the telephone, landline from public booth, a street landmark then essential for long distance exchanges. Each dog walking, I rushed in the booth around midnight with Lyetta, the formerly Moscow tramp, now Geneva bourgeoisie by the handset. Dial the numbers of the phone credit card followed by those of Rabbit parents' home, confirm with a # which sometimes allowed me to surprise her leaving for the office.

Some night walks lengthened more than others. Monique was surprised by the varying duration of the errands. She could not imagine that, in the evenings of successful calling, Ferney's night would resound with the clucking of a Rabbit too sensitive to the roaring of a Tiger!

**MMV**  
**ANTICONSTITUTIONALLY**

In 1992, my voice was not enough to tip the scales of the Maastricht Treaty<sup>94</sup>. This time, I was on the side of the winners - or rather on the side of those whose victory was going to be stolen.

On May 29, 2005 the French refused, by referendum, at a majority vote of almost 55% of "NO", the ratification of the treaty "*Establishing a Constitution for Europe*" which had been signed in October 2004 by the 25 Heads of State and Government concerned.

To enter into force, the Treaty needed unanimous ratification. The French No therefore invalidated the text. Since the Dutch also voted No a month later, the ratification process was interrupted after consultation with 18 states. Among the latter, only 3 had implemented the referendum method - Spain (YES), France and the Netherlands -, the other ratifications resulting from a vote by the Parliaments.

It was for France the third referendum on a European treaty, after those of 1972 -enlargement- and 1992 -called fiscal balances criteria of Maastricht- and the first rejection.

The reasons for a majority negative vote are considered to be linked to the refusal of a loss of national independence beyond that already resulting from the 1992 referendum and to the construction of the text around principles far from being unanimous in France, such as the pre-eminence of economic liberalism or the envisaged limits to public services.

The fact that the draft treaty was drawn up by an *ad hoc* Convention chaired by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, which the French had not reappointed as President of the Republic in 1981, probably also played in favour of the mobilization of NO supporters.

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<sup>94</sup> The Maastricht treaty notably imposed upon member states the so-called Convergence criteria fixing compulsory objectives in terms of inflation, public debt, government deficit, long term interest rates which rigor is said to have played a dramatic role in installing a lasting social and economic crisis throughout Europe.

The only consequence of not ratifying the treaty was to replace it with another text essentially repeating the same provisions after cosmetic rearrangement.

This "new" treaty, known as the Lisbon treaty, was signed by the representatives of the member states in 2007. The ratification procedure that followed was not carried out in France by referendum, but through parliament.

The result was a dramatic loss of credibility from a majority of French voters for their national and the European governments. Not only was their rejection of the content of the proposed Constitution denied by the repetition of the same provisions in the Lisbon Treaty, but they were also not consulted on this new text, on the grounds that their opinion would probably be negative again.

This sequence resulted in a considerable strengthening of opinions unfavourable to the pursuit of European construction, due to the loss of confidence in the institutions responsible for implementing a so-called representative democracy, as well as in a growing disaffection with the electoral process.

European integration was now seen as taking place against popular will and aspirations - a distrust that has continued unabated since then.

## LVI RETIREMENT

My separation from my main employer, the one who made me travel the world and gave me the little prestige I can claim, took place on December 4, 2005.

Why the 4? Because calendar had made me start on September 4, Monday obliges. Why December? Because the renewal of the management team of the union took place every 1<sup>st</sup> December and I intended to complete my tenure before passing on to Pierre a brightly shining torch. Why 2005? Because our pension plan allowed for early retirement from the age of 55 with a very reasonable actuarial penalty for long careers - mine, almost entirely within the same institution, was not short.

I would certainly have been able to extend and further extend for ten years an occupation leading me to climb one or two more steps to glory. However, my firm choice for early retirement was based on four observations.

For one - to have held so long in a system based on anticommunism - tripartism and social laws were conceived, in the years after the First World War, as a backfire to the revolutions which were looming on many horizons –was some kind of a miracle, no need to tempt the devil for too long. Second - ambitious or not, one has got ethics - what a more noble function than that of President of the Union, *primus inter pares* ? How would any promotion not have been perceived as akin to corruption? Three, like a superstitious fear. The death of my father when he had just obtained the right to continue to wear the harness beyond the regulatory sixty years in his profession, reminded me that a good retirement is a retirement that one enjoys. Do not wait too long to collect the fruits of your contributions.

Finally, the fall of subordination opened up prospects for rupture and Rabbit. Earlier that year, at a major meeting in Beijing where I represented my organisation, we promised to each other the earth, love wonders and forever loyalty.

Monique had wished to be traveling with me on that occasion, wishing to reconnect with the city that had been dear to her, and to meet outside the Geneva confines the team of organizers who had supported her during my forfeiture when the Karen era. Our Rabbit-Tiger oath was therefore exchanged in a hotel room I had rented for us in parallel. During the day, Rabbit and I were at the Novotel. In the evening, I reintegrated myself conjugal at the Swissôtel.

Little to say that I hardly frequented the meetings. Our future was more important to me than that of social security. This oath, however clandestine

it was, was no less sincere, and the retirement termination bonus would provide it with financial security. I had taken care to open a special account to have this treasure deposited there, safe from a power of attorney which would lead Monique, as soon as she became aware of my renewed turpitude, to withdraw half of the assets, as she had done in a previous time.

In short, everything concurred to justify a departure. It was sober - farewell union ceremony, packaging and delivery to Kermorvan, Ferneysian residence put up for sale, we were not yet at the end of the year that all the bridges were cut with the life of before.

Once retired in our countryside, it took me a few weeks before daring to get away from the screen for the postprandial walks that Lyetta, a dog also retired, was impatiently waiting for. I was afraid, moving away whatever briefly from my vigilance post, that I might miss a Rabbit Skype, my non-response then leading her to fear that I was betraying ourselves.

I finally understood that a time lag of seven hours left me a comfortable niche to frolic across fields, say from 2 to 4 pm, the Skype of a sleepy love only intervening afterwards. Our exchanges were punctual: in addition to the evening which picked her up at night, her awakening was my bedtime, my departure for daily shopping, around eleven o'clock, coincided with the end of her day, there was in Huelgoat a telephone booth discreetly located where I could take my ease.

Everything was rolling smoothly. The project that my team had not been able to win began and, failing to be its leader, I collaborated to it often enough to stud my passport with stamps, each of them bearing witness to our hooking up.

It only remained to take the plunge. Fifteen years later, we are still there!

## MMVI ON THE RAILS

Parisian forever, yet I never took the tramway in my city of birth. This type of transport remained, for me, associated with the sepia of old postcards, with Geneva folklore or with the technological backwardness of the countries where the metro was slow to set up.

My certainties faltered when, on December 16, 2006, Bertrand Delanoë, then mayor of Paris, inaugurated the T3 line, thus marking the return of the tramway in the French capital. The tram, by the way, is a railroad composed of flat rails ("*trams*") located in the heart of the city.

This relatively old means of urban transport had a curious fate. Its drawbacks had gradually made it disappear until such time when, from the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was gradually reintroduced where it had been banished from.

The tramway network in the Paris Region officially began to develop under the Second Empire, from 1855. It operated until 1937 in inner Paris, a little later in the suburbs (with the exception of the city of Versailles whose tramway was operational until 1957). The electrification of the lines began in Paris in 1912. Previously, the tram was first horse-drawn - horses pulled vehicles on rail - then operated with compressed air or steam.

The first line of the Paris metro dates from July 1900; its inauguration coincided with the organization of the Olympic Games whose site it served. The two means of rail transport in Paris have therefore operated in sync for three decades, and the decline of the tram is not linked to the rise of the metro. The laying of rails in the middle of the roadway was simply considered in the 1930s as incompatible with the development of car traffic, because of the risks involved and the high cost of densification works.

To complete the metropolitan network, the choice therefore fell on gasoline buses, due to the low infrastructure costs required for their development, and the low level of fuel prices.

The reintroduction of electric trams, envisaged in Paris from 1995, responds to another logic: the considerable increase in the price of fuel, considerations linked to pollution of the surrounding environment by petrol or diesel engines, together justified the heavy expenditure on infrastructure required to revive the network. These expenses were all the higher since, in order to better ensure traffic safety, the new trams had to have exclusive running lanes, while, for aesthetic reasons, their power cables had to be buried.

Like Paris, many French cities whose trams had disappeared re-established their network in the early 2000s. There are thus around thirty French cities having returned to the tramway between 1985 (Nantes) and 2014 (Besançon) for an investment cost per kilometre of up to 40 million euros.

The modern tram is certainly not an economical mode of transport to set up. Its advantages from an ecological point of view are, however, relatively little discussed. It is therefore reasonable to think that, despite its cost for communities and the inconvenience for traffic generated during or even after the works, the tram will continue to benefit from a "*love rating*" allowing it to be sustained after its unexpected rebirth.

## LVII SVIATOSLAV

I had just retired when I learned, through my Moscow contacts, that Sviatoslav had definitely left us.

A friend of just thirty years, a sadness at the height of this nice Soviet giant - so calm, so reassuring, and undoubtedly, so powerful! I did not want to inform Monique of this mourning, and she herself left without knowing that he had preceded her, perhaps surprised that he no longer came to the news.

I owe a lot to Sviatoslav - it is rare for me to write this about former colleagues, hard as it is for my cockiness to admit I am in debt.

We had shared an office over three years. Sviatoslav was a sort of coordinator or political commissar for the Soviet officials in our organization. Every day I so had the Russian language in my ears, plus morning and afternoon an invitation to join for coffee. I was told that those who did not know me well enough believed me to be Russian or Ukrainian. As for those aware of my party inclination, they easily inferred that subjugation to Moscow definitely stuck to the skin of French Communists.

We met over the weekends, exclusively in Switzerland, the great Giscardian<sup>95</sup> democracy did not go so far as to recognize as legitimate border crossers the KGB<sup>96</sup> apparatchiks. We were going on mission together, Helsinki, Washington, Kiev, Manila ..., together we prepared the meetings. He supplied me with vodka, he who did not drink, caviar and Havana cigars from the Embassy's duty free, he who no longer smoked. I corrected his French and introduced him to the mysteries of Western social protection.

I believe we motivated similar affections to the fairer sex. In at least three cases, this lady I knew would similarly have been delighted to succumb to him. But contrary to me, and from what I saw, Sviatoslav did not indulge into temptation.

When I returned from China, he had left for Moscow. We met there, me representing the organization, him his Ministry. And the chemistry continued to work. Exchanges and visits, friendship and protocol.

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<sup>95</sup> From the name of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, French right-wing President from 1974 to 1981.

<sup>96</sup> KGB - *Komitét Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*, translated in English as the Committee for State Security, was the [secret police](#) force of the Soviet Union



He was the one who introduced Monique to join the French-speaking Moscow theatre troupe, it was him who, along with Nadia, his lifelong wife, organized a memorable party for my half-centenary.

After I left Moscow, we then saw each other three or four times a year, when he led the delegation of his country to big Geneva gatherings. One day, he was not there. I worried about him with his assistant, who told me that the giant got a cold.

He did not cure this cold ...

I could not go to Moscow for the farewell ceremony. Informed too late, already on the move. The only mark of my sorrow was the eulogy in the Union magazine that I signed with my real name, not the pseudonym coating with decency my unofficial writings. I cried after Sviatoslav with my face uncovered.

Other co-workers have left us too soon. For them, I mourned too, but my tears flowed under a pseudonym. For Sviatoslav, I wanted it differently. Just to thank the Great Soviet homeland one last time.

MMVII  
SÉGOLÈNE

On May 4, 2007, I attended the last meeting of Ségolène Royal's presidential campaign in Brest. I came with Pierre, my stepfather, whose 85 years did not hesitate for a moment. Unity will be Ségolène's strength!

On May 6, she was defeated in the second round. Curious destiny of the first woman to qualify for the final of a French presidential election. Her supporters dreamed that she would form with Hillary Clinton, then also in the running for the presidency of her country, a female duo in the leading seats of a better humanity.

In the end, both of them pulled out of the game. For her part, Ségolène Royal was subjected to sarcasm and constant and violent disparagement which nothing in her human and political career seems to justify, but that it is reasonable to attribute to the gendered disbelief accompanying her career.

French political life is particularly ungrateful to women. The right to vote was acquired late, compared to many other developed countries. Only one woman, under the presidency of François Mitterrand, reached the post of prime minister, which she occupied only very briefly. There are few female ministers whose name will remain associated with important reforms - in fact, only Simone Veil (abortion rights), Martine Aubry (35 hours working week) and Christiane Taubira (marriage for all) enter *a priori* in the category of political figures whose name is very widely known to the population.

Did the weight of the Salic law<sup>97</sup> "*woman does not succeed the kingdom of France*" remain such in France that it tacitly justifies the continuous difficulties of women to break into politics or to sustain themselves at the top?

It has been more than twenty years - the constitutional revision dates from July 1999 - that it has been

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<sup>97</sup> The Salic law was the rules governing Salian kings between the IV<sup>th</sup> and the VI<sup>th</sup> century - including Clovis considered as the first king of France. The article on male exclusivity for accession to the throne was later re-used when in the XIV<sup>th</sup> century the king of England pretended to become also king of France as heir through the daughter of a defunct king. This was the reason for a war that lasted 100 years.

established that the law "*favours the equal access of men and women to electoral mandates and to elective functions*". Beyond statistics and apparent parity, the equality of opportunities between men and women in politics is however far from being acquired.

Since 1999, there have only been a dozen women who have been appointed to one of the main ministries in France - so-called "*sovereign ministries*", justice, the armed forces, the interior, foreign affairs, the economy - half of whom have been ministers of justice.

If over the last twenty years six out of eleven ministers of justice have been women, the proportion has become three out of eight for Defence, one in ten, fifteen, seventeen for Foreign Affairs, Interior and the Economy. There will have been eight prime ministers over this twenty-year period, none of whom were women.

Even if some people display their doubts, Ségolène Royal provides a typical example of this shameful discrimination.

Her career, her political interventions, her achievements in the positions she held, her electoral successes and the conditions of her defeats, her popularity are such that it is at the very least surprising that she was not called to higher functions.

Perhaps men with the power of appointing feared that with these qualities and her itinerary, she would cast too much shadow around her. The fate of Ségolène Royal could thus illustrate a *contrario* the words of Françoise Giroud<sup>98</sup>: "*Woman would really be equal to man the day when, in an important position, we would designate an incompetent woman.* "

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<sup>98</sup> Françoise Giroud (1916-2003) was a famous French journalist, editor in chief and Minister, known for her feminist approach to politics.

LVIII  
BRITTANY

Monique was not necessarily happy to retire in Kermorvan well before the usual time. Even without rehashing it too much, she feared what would be said of a premature return to the place of her birth where her parents resided again. Difficult independence in this hamlet of twenty households - a haven for retirees, moving in there is enough to age you by a decade if not two.

And then whom to go to?

The vicarious grudges are tenacious. Each fireplace does not readily exchange with all the others. Geneva for this is more neutral. Those we encountered there were almost always first generation migrants, no ancestral hatred peddled with no other memory than that of the irreconcilable.

Finally, the pieces were put in place relatively easily. Madenn leaved opposite to us with her then husband and Lenaig in gestation, this was a counterpart to the parental farmhouse. The comings and goings between the points of this family triangle occupied the days as well as the redevelopment of the half-acre surrounding our estates. Day-to-day contacts were also expanding. Monique, a local product with family around, found some of her roots back. Madenn, permanently installed and freshly elected to seat as municipal opponent, provided other entrances.

Monique attended the meetings of the Municipal Council. She was as indignant as her daughter for the incongruities of the then mayor, while I acted as a "*shadow writer*" of a gazette from the municipal minority, as well as webmaster of a site created with the bits of string of my computer literacy.

Every morning, I escaped to the main town of the canton, a faithful client to the bars of the central square. I became sober out of reason but still standing with my coffee dialoguing with red wines, white wines and pints of rurality. In the afternoon, I discovered with Lyetta, the Leman-Russian Laïka dog, the innumerable trails of Yeun-Ellez region.

We were definitely settled, that's how I perceived it, on the day of house-warming that made us assemble whoever was important in the village. About fifty people rustling at a buffet dinner which I then foresee, in retrospect, as Act One of my elective anchoring.

Everything was all the better for me in the heart of the Monts d'Arrée, that I escaped from it quite often.

Playing on the electoral calendar, I showed up almost on the very day of my retirement to sit on the board of our health insurance fund. My prestige then fresh and intact acquired me a mandate of three years, with quarterly paid meetings, transport and subsistence allowances. I went there as one tastes

a great vintage - to decant, the Brest-Lyon plane, to savour, a rented car on a route across mountains and lakes, to swallow, a friendly stay, Guy, Ingrid, Pierre.

These breakaways, I lived them all the better since no guilt came to darken them.

Not the slightest hint of Karen or elsewhere that could distract me from the most beautiful horizon. Because the months without Geneva, I escaped to China, consulting on a project that altogether lasted fifteen years, to Washington or to Bangkok. I took advantage of training courses allegedly organized for my Beijing counterparts to drink Rabbit's flows with a zeal all the more efficiently in love since a good Swiss doctor had made me discover the mechanical virtues of vasodilation.

Ah! the good life ...

MMVIII  
YES WE CAN!

In May 2008, I joined Rabbit in Washington DC, where she took part in one of these training courses for which her employer was so lavish at the time. While she is swotting, I roam the city. Presidential elections are approaching. I am struck by the omnipresence on the boards and walls of a candidate whose charisma jumps out at me. No matter, the unlikely first name, no matter the ancestry, no matter the lack of experience. This one is a leader!

On November 4, 2008 Barack Obama was elected 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States against John McCain, with 52.9% of the vote and 365 electors out of 540.

His victory in the race for the Democratic Party candidate had come as a surprise to many. Indeed, while the choice for the nomination was between two candidates with unprecedented dominant characteristics - African-American for Barack Obama, woman for Hillary Clinton -, the forecasts outside the United States tilted in favour of the "least novelty" with a candidate from the seraglio, well known, with positions not markedly different from those taken by her husband during his two terms as President.

It is possible that Democratic voters have, for some, chosen in reaction to the dynastic character of a candidate seen as representing a clan - the "*clan Clinton*" as there were among the Republicans the "*Bush clan*" and as there had been the "*Kennedy clan*".

Very early in his campaign, Barack Obama also benefited from the support of many personalities considered progressive within the Democratic Party.

The fact that he is mixed-race, born of a Muslim father and a Catholic mother who raised him as an atheist before he belatedly converted to Protestantism, did not play against him, perhaps on the contrary .

His lack of personal wealth and the modesty of his professional life - he was a professor before entering politics - were undoubtedly positive factors for the victory, which was however uncertain until late in the campaign.

Once elected President, Barack Obama had the merit of leading his government according to the progressive principles that had done so much for his popularity both in the United States and abroad.

His campaign slogan - "Yes we can" - inspired by the union struggles of Latin American agricultural workers in the southern United States, quickly became a universal touchstone of popular movements.

Among the most significant achievements of the two Obama presidencies, one can single out his positions against the gun lobby, the normalization of relations with the Government of Cuba, the policy of detente in matters of international relations, the commitment to favour health coverage for all, measures to revive the economy such as those of environmental protection, protection of the rights of minorities including migrant workers, etc.

His presidencies are also remarkable for the absence of scandal or controversy relating to his private or public life, or that of his family members. As the first non-white president of the United States, Barack Obama had much to prove. It is an understatement to say that he succeeded in brilliantly demonstrating the absurdity of the positions claiming that certain ethnic groups would be intrinsically more able than others to assume responsibilities of universal scope.

The Obama presidencies - he was brilliantly re-elected in 2012 for a second and final term - will remain as exemplary in the history of the United States.

A single man, however, cannot durably change the course of history. Personal ambitions and fears have led the Democratic Party to make a losing choice for his succession. The American people have electorally joined, for at least one term, the mire of ignorance, intolerance, self-sufficiency and the golden calf. The course of history was stopped, no one knows at the time of writing if it will resume its march.

LIX  
MAYOR

Madenn being municipal councillor, I had been frolicking around the local government, local news reporter, special adviser, webmaster ever since for the minority party. When she decided not to extend the experience, I hardly hesitated to join the list opened by one of her running mates. Unlike what often happened in my life stages, I did not wait for someone to solicit me. The first step was from my part - after it is true that a bar companion suggested to me that, all things considered, I would not disgrace the municipal council.

Monique had once or twice expressed interest in this conclave. Brennilis, she was born there and there she focused most of her holidays until late tweens. She attended meetings, participated in the counting of votes, conversed tactics and strategies with one of her playmates who was to become my most faithful support in the team to come. I do not know if she will have regretted that my initiative cut her off, or if she would have felt relieved not to have to decline an invitation to commit which, perhaps, would not have come. It is therefore to me that the communal torch falls.

The voters of Brennilis are not numerous enough not to have the formidable privilege of being able to crush the lists of candidates. The ballot boxes did not hurt me too much, since my name came out in good rank among the elected officials, honourable average.

Not to be too "*crossed*", I certainly owe it to the visibility of my running mates, to the prestige of my stepfather, to the notoriety of my daughter, as well as, in part, to the quality of propaganda material in which more work had been put than usual in a village of 500 inhabitants.

On the evening of the election, having seven representatives out of the eleven that make up the Council earns us the privilege to invite a cohort of enthusiastic and thirsty supporters to the community café cum grocery store. I note that no one seems to be prepared to say the words of circumstances, not even the initiator of our approach. So I stand on a table to, overcoming the hubbub, declaim the classics of thanks, announcements of new era, promises of listening and participation that everyone was waiting for to drink again.

Meeting of the list before the official meeting, to designate its mayor. I believe there was some sort of conspiracy. The round table starts from our top of the list, the one that garnered the most votes. He reserves the right to speak last - serious mistake!



The initiative returns to the old one of Monique, who throws my name on the table without having informed me beforehand. The following speakers all support, so that when the floor becomes mine, I just have to accept, subject to an unanimity nomination which is imposed on the following and last speaker.

Don't count your chicken before they are hatched - the one who launched the adventure finds himself deprived of the fruits he has allowed to mature. Fallen king before the coronation, deemed too decrepit, too bureaucratic, too grumpy, too dependent on a wife who is known to dominate him. I believe that she suffered more than he did from this humiliation.

So here I am, almost inadvertently, communist mayor of an assembly of various centres - six years in office, high and low, ebb and tidal bore.

On the official photo in the regional press of the mayor surrounded by his assistants, I do not smile. The upcoming session had worried me so much, that, after brushing my teeth which some will think would scratch the parquet floor of the town hall, I had forgotten to put my dentures back on.

## MMIX BRICS

Since the fall of the Soviet dwelling, many found that the world suffered from a lack of alternative to American imperialism. China, which everything called for taking a position as a second world pole, was still procrastinating. The dragon finally set itself in motion. President Hu Jintao 胡锦涛 (the one who danced with Bernadette Chirac) was going to retire, his anticipated successor, the vice-president, had to demonstrate his capacity for innovation before receiving the supreme anointing. We were waiting Xi Jinping's 习近平 *magnum opus*, it was the return of China to the great international scene, where it orchestrated its own version of the New World Symphony.

The first summit of the four BRIC countries - Brazil, Russia, India and China - took place on June 16, 2009 in Yekaterinburg, Russia. In 2011 South Africa joined the group which was henceforth called BRICS.

Five countries, known as "emerging" bringing together 40% of the world population, producing together as much as the European Union or the United States.

Despite their sometimes-divergent interests, the member countries of the BRICS have in common a desire to exert more weight on a renovated world economic order which would recognize the role they consider should be theirs.

In addition to the political dialogue which, from annual summit to annual summit, has enabled the alliance to survive the political vicissitudes of some of its members, the BRICS rely on their own financial instruments, in particular a development bank based in Shanghai. The Bank can grant loans to its members or to other emerging countries without, and this is a major difference from other international financial institutions such as the IMF or the World Bank, making these facilities conditional on the orientation of the economic, social or monetary policies.

The Bank's capital is \$ 100 billion, and its lending capacity is \$ 350 billion. This is 17 times more than a year of operations for the European Investment Bank, also created in 2009.

The BRICS are not the first attempt by countries previously called "*developing*" to jointly influence the future of the world.

The previous or parallel groupings are however less economic than political, like the Movement known as of the non-aligned countries - neither steadfast supporters of the USSR, nor unconditional allies of the United States - which, out of the joint declaration in 1956 of four Heads of State - Tito for Yugoslavia, Nasser for Egypt, Nehru for India and Soekarno for Indonesia - gradually became an international organization bringing together 120 member states and 17 observers at its 2019 summit.

In 2050, China's GDP is expected to be twice that of the United States. India would then be on a par with the latter - ahead of Brazil, Russia and South Africa. The success and international mobilization capacity of the BRICS therefore inspired China to adopt a second initiative worthy of its capabilities. This is the "*Belt and Road Initiative*", originating in the new Silk roads named after the explorations of Marco Polo.

This global project, launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, initially involved 68 countries, representing 2/3 of the world economy. In 2019, it had 140 member states for an evolving project which, under the impetus of China, could become a new frame of reference for globalization.

In seventy years, the People's Republic of China will therefore have succeeded in taming the chimera which the leaders of the former USSR vainly tried to capture. China is, almost without a blow, to become the undisputed center of the new world.

What a long way on the path to internationalization, since in 1955 Zhou Enlai 周恩来 had appeared as one of the leaders among other exceptional personalities of the Bandung Africa-Asia conference!

## LX CHINA

Even though I had not been able to lead a team victoriously to the assault of a project competitive process, I knew how to sell myself to the winners. I had become in 2008 a regular appointee of the EU-China Social security reform project. This project marked the beginning of the acute phase of my schizophrenia. As a young international retiree, I became a service provider on behalf of French, British and German firms which had acquired the right to intervene in China with European funding.

The first decade of the 21st century did not get bogged down in the mesh of ethics. Access barred through the main door, I intruded successively with each of the side windows. I am not sure that such clever trick would be possible today as the declarations of exclusivity have become more sophisticated. Anyway, my knowledge in the field, whether Chinese or European, the accumulated experience and the lack of local interpersonal skills of the winners did not allow them to close the door on the foot that very quickly I slipped into the half-open gate.

The project lasted three years, during which I carried out 19 missions from Brennilis to Beijing. The mayoral allowance being what it was, almost symbolic, I did not have too much remorse about exercising my mandate on a part-time basis. I also made it my duty to accompany Rabbit in her own trips, whenever the latter did not involve too much promiscuity. When I was admitted in her official luggage, I was discreet during the day, avoiding the quarters where the future of her bureaucracy was discussed or the surroundings of her Washington head office.

Often we prolonged the meetings through other frolicking, lovemaking, impromptu or stretched weekends. It was during these years that our Map of Tender<sup>99</sup> became dense. Orlando, Bangkok, Shanghai, Amoy, Richmond, Hong Kong... In Washington, Foggy Bottom and Georgetown had no more secrets for me, my bicycle knew all the parks of Beijing and suburbs.

The frequency of my visits was such that I ended up dispensing with repatriating my belongings.

Even if I had not yet the audacity to settle on a yearly basis, Rabbit took care of accommodating suitcases becoming heavier and more complete with

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<sup>99</sup> The Map of Tender was a French map of an imaginary land called Tendre produced in the first part of Madeleine de Scudéry's 1654-61 novel *Clélie*. The map represents the path towards love according to the female intelligentsia of the time period.

each round trip. The apartment hotel where I stayed was very attentive. Rabbit received the key to our haven before picking me up at the airport, no minute lost before exulting, the threshold barely crossed.

Once, we had hastily carried out the stripping, leaving our clothes on the ground floor before joining the bridal mezzanine alcove. We heard the door opening. It was not the morality police, just the hotel manager bringing us welcome flowers. He went around the scattered clothes pretending not to pay any attention to our perched breaths.

Monique didn't seem to care too much. The suitcase hosted by the project, decentralized activities around the world, nothing was questioned. I smoothed the rough edges if necessary, at the cost of a daily call. When Rabbit was staying with me overnight, I had to be a little tricky, taking advantage of the ablutions, invent a last-minute shopping justifying leaving the apartment in a hurry, seeking the network from the restaurant toilets, using an evening banquet as a pretext to join the wife earlier in the day without being at risk of offending the lover ... The ploys sometimes slogged, but ultimately it always worked.

I'm not sure how Rabbit justified her absences with her husband and daughter.

No doubt her parents were frequently used as a marital alibi. Was it mutual indifference? We had agreed not to make our respective halves suffer from an irrefutable schism. She and I alike, anyway, we both lacked audacity. To the point that I discouraged her from accepting an American transfer which she was offered, that would have freed her. I knew that the young Rooster, an essential companion in her transhumance, would have hindered our merger. And I didn't feel like languishing at her door in the heart of Bethesda.

MMX

FROM PLAINS TO FORESTS<sup>100</sup>

October 1972, Sports' Palladium, Paris Porte de Versailles. Monique and I had the incredible luck of receiving two tickets for Jean Ferrat's last concert. The enclosure is packed. The public, especially young and communist, is in a meeting. From where we stand, high in the circle, we can barely hear the singer. What does it matter! Everyone knows the lyrics on the tip of the red flag.

Jean Ferrat died on March 13, 2010, at the age of eighty. He was undoubtedly the most popular of this immense generation of French artists recognizing themselves in the values carried by the French Communist Party.

As Ferrat himself wrote in *Ma France*, a flagship song and a song banned on public airwaves as soon as it was released in 1969: *"your prophetic artists never stop saying that it is time for misfortune to disappear."* The list of French Communist artists is particularly long, even longer than one would expect from electoral successes.

The support of artists for the French revolutionary movement certainly does not date back from 1945. In the 1920s, many writers joined or accompanied the brand new working class party - Henri Barbusse, Anatole France, Romain Rolland ... are great and famous precursors.

But this impetus is without common measure with that which, from the Liberation, mobilised with a hitherto unsuspected power across all branches of the artistic and intellectual French life.

To quote Jean Ferrat again, *"Picasso holds the world from the edge of his palette, the doves fly away from Eluard's lips"*. Names like those of Gide, Montand, Aragon, Fernand Leger, Juliette Greco, Gérard Philipe, Jean Vilar - even Jacques Brel, Hughes Auffray or Joe Dassin form the vanguard of the immense army of fellow travellers.

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<sup>100</sup> This verse is from one of Jean Ferrat's most famous songs, entitled "My France"

This adhesion is too massive and extends over a too long duration to be an effect of fashion or upscale gregarism. The Communist Party appeared, in the eyes of many artists anxious to commit to a better future, as the only political force that had known how to get through the turmoil without compromising with Nazism and its doctrine, and therefore the only one capable of guiding the march towards a new horizon.

It is to the honour of the Communist Party to have known how to attract, and often retain, so many such diverse talents. And it is to the honour of artists to have recognized and followed the path to the future. The number of them, engaged on the avenues opened by the French Communist Party, remains much higher than the now reduced electoral influence of the Party.

As for Jean Ferrat, he will stay as one of the great popular artists of the 20th century in France. One of those for whom, ten years after their death, the nostalgia is immense, and the posthumous success cannot be denied.

## LXI NETWORKING

Each time has its socio-technological marker.

I went from an epoch when having the telephone installed at home was a privilege - I remember my mother using her press card to get a line to equip the two rooms of the grandparents - to that of climbing the G degrees uniting laptops less and less phones.

During our installation in a Breton retirement, the apex was Facebook.

The progressive development of powerful streams for data transmission had progressively eliminated the rustic exchanges hosted in discussion groups limited to text format - Usenet -, whose participants, despite being legions, were lured with ADSL towards less austere canals.

Communication and discovery lost a lot when Facebook drowned Usenet.

It was like entering into a new era. Instead of being interested in Chinese language, in history, in sociology, in macramé or in politics, jumping ten times a day from one topic to the other, we now splash around in the messy pond of real and false friends, stunned with retransmissions, with peremptory assertions, with cacophonous images, with no other moderation than that of weariness.

I flowed with ease in this mould of grass-root mediocrity.

My appearance on Facebook dates from May 2009. It then took me three years to decide to equip the village with its own electronic storefront. Robust technology, since six years after the abandonment of any type of maintenance, the hundreds of pages of "*Living well in Brennilis*" remain online, all photos offered, with even a few visitors.

Visitors or friends?

Difficult to discern the good from the chaff. It is not a certain Aloheo Pensec who will deny me, him whose account I have invented so that, from the bottom of his fiction, he comes to inflate a little the skinny statistics of the fans of the communal page.

I am stagnating around 300 contacts. I know many. If I publish, first of all images, with chosen text, not too personal, the least arrogant I can, it is as much to convince me that I still create and share, as to provide grain to grind for those who would share my two cents.

Facebook allowed me to reconnect with some. It is through it that Natasha, the Belarussian, reappeared on a summer night in 2012, more than ten years after our last bombastic embraces on leaving.



It was also through Facebook that I was able to convince Monique of my presence in Mongolia. A hastily invented study tour to camouflage a winter escapade with Rabbit to the south of France. Selected photos of Ulaan Baatar's surroundings, the staging of my shapka and Canadian jacket in the overheated entrance hall of my Beijing apartment. Machiavellian of ubiquity, I had restricted access to this status, lest an overly wise public would have discovered the prank.

Facebook of the best as of the worst.

I use it, I sometimes abuse it, I pile up there memory slices in an endless cupboard.

MMXI  
DSK

By propelling as head of the International Monetary Fund the one whom everyone then considered his likely future rival for the presidential election, Nicolas Sarkozy had it all tied up. He knew indeed that, when the time would come, the "true left" would refuse its votes to the guardian of the liberal temple, thus guaranteeing him a re-election by default.

Now on 14 May 2011, Dominique Strauss-Kahn was arrested at the airport in New York shortly before his flight taking off to Paris. He is charged with sexual assault in a Manhattan hotel suite. He, whom some already saw as president of France, thus defeating the very one who had had him appointed to the highest positions in international finance, saw in one day his most legitimate dreams collapse.

Once again, a prominent member of the French political caste realised, at his expense, that the immunity he believed he was enjoying was only a facade. Instead of protecting, the pedestal ends up being only one area from which to fall. One may indeed be of whatever opinion about the circumstances around DSK's arrest, he was customary, with knowledge from all and almost in open view, of the kind of turpitude from which the alleged facts emerged.

French politicians are more often than not involved in scandals directly linked to their mandate or to the conception they forge of proper use of the privileges attached to their function. Financial appetite, sexual appetite, appetite for power ...

There is certainly little reason *a priori* why French elected officials would be intrinsically or socially more irreparably corruptible than their counterparts of other European countries.

The difference is that they are only sanctioned as a last resort. The posture of benevolent indifference towards them must become untenable and in the end counterproductive for their easy going in-country

sponsors, or they must be caught in nets stretched outside territorial waters.

The circumstances that led to the fall of DSK could not have been met in other countries, for the simple reason that previous cases would have stopped his rise much earlier.

The list of scandals involving men (rarely women) politicians in France in recent decades is a perfect illustration of the strong resilience of many of the protagonists. False diplomas, misuse of social assets, fictitious jobs, espionage, embezzlement, tax evasion, erotomania or priapism, nothing seems strong enough to permanently hinder the pursuit of political careers the sudden interruption of which, when the charade was taken too far, is greeted with a mix of "*I can't believe it*", "*Not a moment too soon*" and "*Did I not tell you*"

Even then, the rebound in the corporate world or the senior civil service appears as an easy way of redemption for those who have stumbled.

One can smile about these adventures. One can find them a decidedly French side, cutting with the austerity pertaining to institutions of Anglo-Saxon or Germanic inspiration. After all, as a state, as an economy and even a moral force, France has often held its rank as a solid power.

The fact that certain elected officials devote much more time to getting around the affairs in which they have embroiled themselves than to serving the common good does not however help to reconcile the people with their so-called elites.

The relative impunity enjoyed by the corrupt, the depraved, the prevaricators provided they are high-flying, contributes to the overall discredit of political leaders with a public opinion aware that the judicial and police system is otherwise hard on the lay persons.

## LXII

### LOCAL POLLS

The town conquered in March 2008, a bit broader local elections were looming three years later. The cantons<sup>101</sup> were then still of reasonable size. A little more than 6,000 voters in that of Pleyben, a renewable drop of water of which Brennilis was a teardrop. I knew a little about the General Council, which is the departmental body where the winners of cantonal elections seat. Many subjects of municipal concern found their echo there, roads, housing, social welfare, school transports, drinking or sewage water, dismantling the nuclear power plant. I had had enough contacts in the first three years of mandate to anticipate that I would feel at ease there, if by any chance ...

When the communist officials of the department came to ask me - they knew me, of course, if only through family links - I did not hesitate half a second to respond favourably. Why me ? A candidate for the true left was needed, in the canton of Pleyben as elsewhere. If possible, someone a little credible by his or her tenure. Around, there were other communist mayors or fellow travellers. They could have done the trick, but no one, it seems, felt like going there, for fear of jeopardizing fragile rural alliances if taking a well-coloured flag too much out of their pockets.

For me, no such concern. My label was notorious, it had in no way bothered my running mates when they drew my name from the electoral hat. Monique was more circumspect. She feared that an overly humiliating thrashing - in the Monts d'Arrée it is a "*jacket*" that one takes - would damage the prestige of my function, or make people chat against her family of red obstinacy. As I only informed her *a posteriori*, no need to argue too much. I then had to reconcile electoral campaign and Sinophile obligations. The result was a very precise calendar of leaflets to distribute and public meetings to be organized during the time slots that attention to the Rabbit left available to me.

The Party is a great organizing force. Monique's cousin, Jean-Jacques, was the local spearhead. With a few good wills that he had no trouble finding, we foresaw, we planned, we prepared and we executed. On paper, everything was settled. The symphony could be played, missing neither a brass nor a bow. It would be an old-fashioned campaign, leaflets on each of the markets in the ten townships of the canton, public meetings in the three main ones and at home. This plan was however not taking into

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<sup>101</sup> France administrative divisions are regions - 13 metropolitans plus 5 overseas -, composed of departments - about 100 -, split into some 4.000 cantons (districts) in which there are several communes - cities or villages, some 35.000 in total. Governments are elected directly by all voters concerned at all levels.

account the changes in habits. In February, open markets in the small towns hardly receive any visitor. Few stalls, even fewer customers, sometimes neither. As for the public meetings, they did not resist the call of television, the refusal of newspapers to announce them and the ambient disinterest in public affairs.

Admittedly, over the first three meetings, our team only had a very relative success. In total, three participants, one per city: a citizen for the first, the mayor of the host municipality for each of the other two. Suffice to say that the Brennilis meeting, scheduled to close the campaign, frightened us a little. The risk of shameful desertification was there, with its procession of stigma to follow for the remaining years of the mandate.

But in fact, to need to worry. On the day and at the time, the Brennilis people were there. The multipurpose room was packed, it was necessary to add chairs. Speeches, questions, applause, ahead for the final victory - with the only regret, not expressed, that a drink was not offered to close the session. And they were right, those who regretted not being able to toast! Had I known of their presence in advance, the bottles would have been aligned. Speech, libations, speech, the three stages of a successful public meeting.

But I did not anticipate properly. No more on polling night. The score in Brennilis, almost 50%, a record for a Communist candidate, the previous one had not even two digits, let me falsely glimpse the glory of entering the second round. Champagne was therefore a must, while one of my assistants went to the main town to carry the results and the counted ballots. His return showered our enthusiasm. The red tsunami was very circumscribed. The other localities had voted according to their usual mood, I was relegated to the same depths as my predecessors.

Satisfaction, however - an average score above the fatal threshold to get campaign expenses reimbursed. And a disillusionment... The canton of Pleyben was too small for candidates to be able to claim such a reimbursement.

So it was out of my pocket - two or three pizza meals and printing fees. Nothing too expensive, with however this doubt: since I was not being reimbursed, did I actually buy the votes ?

MMXII

## RECAP THE CHAMPAGNE

May 6, 2012, 8 p.m. In the town hall of Brennilis, the municipal majority brings out the champagne to celebrate what we still consider a great popular victory.

François Hollande has just been elected President of the Republic with 51.6% of the votes cast. His election is based on the rallying of the most left-wing forces of the electorate, which totalled in the first round nearly 15% of the votes, and on the support of a centrist representative, François Bayrou, who mobilized 9% of the voters - the future president himself being credited with nearly 29% of the vote.

During the following legislative elections, the Socialist Party and its allies, in particular environmentalists, won a large majority of seats, the Left Front barely succeeding in forming a group with 10 MPs. Since its 2011 renewal, the majority of the Senate is also on the left, which never happened before under the Fifth Republic.

The omens were therefore particularly favourable to allow the conception then the adoption and the implementation of a radical policy in harmony with the electoral program which allowed the victory of the socialist candidate. This program was often summarized in the famous formula "*My true enemy is the world of finance*" used by the candidate Hollande in January 2012.

This slogan had won him the vote in the first or second round of the left fringe of an electorate for which, until then, François Hollande represented only an avatar of minority neoliberal social democracy for the general opinion as from within the Socialist Party. The "*left*" candidates during the internal primaries were in fact the majority, but, during the second round of this primary election, one of the protagonists chose to let the unity behind the candidate who came first in the first round prevail over his ideological preferences.

Unlike François Mitterrand 30 years earlier, François Hollande had not negotiated a pact with the most

progressive forces. He would not seek their support to govern. The abandonment of the principles which had elected him was therefore almost immediate. Not a word anymore about social justice, renegotiation of European treaties and struggle against the dominant positions of financial oligarchy.

There followed an increasingly marked break with the "*real country*", those under 35 and the non-managerial employees who had overwhelmingly voted for him.

The quinquennium of François Hollande was therefore that of sadness and disarray for progressive forces. They had the feeling of being, once again, betrayed by the one they had made king, that the betrayal came from a government of the left with the turning point of austerity in 1983, from a president of the right elected by a large majority to block factious threats in exchange for a promise to "*reduce the social divide*" forgotten the day after the second round or a cynical president who decided to ignore the popular will on the founding principles of Europe, expressed in a referendum that his predecessor had called.

Too many disappointments feed disenchantment. François Hollande may remain in history as the President who most contributed to the disenchantment of the French towards a political class in which they have an extreme difficulty in recognizing themselves.

The more assertive Rabbit became, the more Karen faded.

Retirement helped, emancipating me from the anxiety of perhaps crossing her at the bend of a corridor, of seeing her seating down in my proximity, of hearing her speak at a meeting. The wound was clearly struggling to heal well. The bruises to the soul are real bruises. They are believed to be soothed, concealed under eyeshadows, zippers or dark glasses, but it only takes one shock to rekindle the pain.

I had in the final days of my disillusionment started the story of my - should I write "*of our*"? - misfortune. The writing had continued over several months, leading to a chubby manuscript of some three hundred pages, whose bulky style and succinct frame had not attracted any publishing house.

It was in the mid-nineties. Ten more cycles followed, during which I somehow managed to avoid crossing her paths. It sometimes took me a lot of Machiavellianism to achieve this, as when I as big Moscow potato refused entry to a mission with the simple *in petto* that she would have taken part in it, or when, Union top dog, I managed to play out at the four corners of the room throughout a goodbye evening for a collaborator, only greeting a group after having made sure that she was not therein.

In Brennilis, when I isolated myself in my den-office to, all closed doors, skyping at leisure my daily Rabbit, the editorially rejected sheets caught my eye. Something was missing to finally turn this heart-breaking page. I could not broadcast *urbi et orbi* the content on the web, Karen had opposed an attempt, believing, how to deny it, that anyone could see right through it, and that readers would recognize her under an unflattering light.

Difficult to prove her wrong on this one, I complied. The diffusion under the samizdat<sup>102</sup> umbrella was something different. However, I could not at leisure duplicate sheets softening and turning yellow in time. The object would hardly have been presentable for the use that I envisioned: sharing with one or the other I loved or appreciated a testimony about oneself who had a history and knew how to break free from it. This concern for posterity had come to me during a stepfamily outing, a cousin by marriage from the vicinity of Quimper exhuming the travel diaries of a

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<sup>102</sup> One calls "samizdat" the clandestine copying and distribution of literature banned by the state, especially formerly in the Soviet Union.



grandfather about whom, otherwise, no one would really care about anymore.

I also needed a memory which was not only oral tradition and daguerreotypes. So I turned to author account editing, responding to the sales prospection of Édilivre. Before entrusting Hoopoe to them - my porcelain is a Rabbit, this ersatz of happiness was a hoopoe, Monique very early on was Little Coyote, and Nuria the Catalan a tiny mouse, loving bestiary -, I groomed the manuscript, purifying it from sentences that were too long, from incongruous repetitions, from untimely page breaks. I received the fifty copies of my redemption just in time for Christmas 2012.

The book, like this one, looked like a real one. Binding, cover page, back cover, ISBN and sales price to the public. I was proud of it, all the same. Gwenaël and Madenn accepted their copy without taking a real look at it after they realized that Hoopoe contained nothing more than the raw manuscript which pages they had turned with a circumspect finger fifteen years before.

I then understood how vain exorcism was. Karen arouse no more curiosity, nor my wanderings with her. However beautiful the ink of their writings I will shake to the four winds, memories will always remain there, slyly hiding between hippocampus and temporal, repointing the nose when, by chance on the Internet, the Hoopoe Muse appears and passes without seeing me.

Seven years later, I have almost no copies left. It would be hard to say who received one. Some recognized themselves, denied my story, but the unhappiness did not last. Dust of time and lack of echo ...

When I make gifts of books to a library, divesting myself in favour of a book seller of a trunk of second hands, I happened to slip Hoopoe in the middle of the pile.

Maybe, thus, someone who reads me will find talent.

## MMXIII CHÁVEZ

The Latin American world has aroused much more revolutionary enthusiasm in recent decades than Europe or la Francophonie. The death of Franco, the martyrdom of Allende, the advent of Perón, the Sandinista flamboyances, the victory of Castro, the sacrifice of Che, Pepe Mujica and Evo Morales taking over the reins from neo-colonial hands, Lula from the capitol to the Tarpeian rock ... and then there was Chávez.

Hugo Chávez, President of Venezuela, died on March 5, 2013 in Caracas. He was 69 years old. Coming from a modest family, from a rural environment, with indigenous and slave ancestors, Chávez and his fellow fighters were able to gradually build the bases bringing victory in the 1998 presidential election with 56% of the vote, five years after having served a prison sentence for a failed coup in 1992 against a government that betrayed its promises. His Movement had since 1994 multiplied electoral successes. His victory enabled him to start the march towards what he called the Bolivarian Revolution or *"21st century socialism"*.

Chávez was elected president four times, each time with comfortable majorities, under flawless conditions for the organization of the ballot. He foiled an attempted coup in 2002 and emerged victorious from a recall referendum obtained by the parliamentary opposition in 2004.

The presidencies of Hugo Chávez are in line with his ideology: participatory democracy, nationalization of key industries, including the oil industry, very important for Venezuela, redistribution of agricultural land to village communities, measures to protect flora and fauna, protection of fishery resources, fight against poverty and hunger, active internationalist policy, literacy and health protection with the support of the Cuban government that the Venezuelan oil helped to counter the increased effects of the American embargo after the fall of the Soviet Union.

This policy, and the successes it met, established the popularity of Chávez well beyond Latin America. It also

aroused constant, virulent and sometimes violent opposition outside, particularly in the United States under the Bush presidencies. Conversely, many personalities and progressive movements recognize themselves in Hugo Chávez.

On the occasion of his demise, intervening after a long illness, tributes abounded with for example in France the reaction of Marie Georges Buffet to *"the disappearance of the one who made it possible to have the voice and the will heard, of those to whom the power of money had always refused it, the one who opened a different path on the American continent, in favour of those who were refused everything and who elected him for this purpose."*

Latin America is a breeding ground for heroes and role models for progressives around the world. It is also singular that states built from the 15th century on aggression and foreign occupation could, from the revolt of the colonizers often allied to the colonized against the metropolitan power, gradually build doctrines of emancipation and rejection of the dominant economic model.

This movement of collective liberation began at the beginning of the nineteenth century with Simon Bolivar, hero of the independence of the Spanish colonies, succeeding Toussaint Louverture in Haiti. The movement counts in Mexico with Emiliano Zapata, continues after the Second World War with leaders of renown and universal influence.

Intervening in response to fears of a threatened financial oligarchy and targeted by national emancipation policies, gunboat diplomacy placed considerable obstacles on the way of Bolivian, Peronist, Castrist and Sandinista leaders. The influence and resilience of Latin American emancipatory thought are nonetheless undeniable.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon had attributed it to Chávez, but many are and will be the leaders of Latin America to thus embody *"the inexhaustible ideal of the humanist hope of the revolution"*.

## LXIV THE ORATORY

Monique was now struggling to climb the floor leading to our room in Kermorvan. I sometimes wondered if we were going to end up like so many old people in Brittany with shortened breath and softening legs, mattress inserted under the stairwell which, with the age coming, will have lost all use except for short-stay visitors, themselves more and more rare.

Then Madenn, who lived opposite us, chose to go into exile. She could no longer bear the unpredictable aggressiveness of an ex-spouse against whom the roll-down shutters that we had placed seemed to be insufficient protection. She therefore crosses a few dozens of kilometres to land near her workplace, distances, even short, constituting the best barrier against the risk of blows.

After she moved, there was nothing objectively holding us back. We too could find a house in one-level. A grandmother's instinct, Monique, who had taken the matter in hand with my grumbled consent - the future, for me, was painted at the other end of Eurasia - wanted first to explore the resources within the new daughter's estate. She quickly understood, however, that being too close meant being overcrowded. Village coexistence was no longer viable in a semi-urban setting.

From agency to advertisement, she soon focused her research. Still Penn-ar-Bed<sup>103</sup>, but no longer the Arrée mountains. She was born there but didn't want to grow old in the same place, too many departures and too much isolation. Heading for Trégor, capital Morlaix. Monique targets a little more, she arranges for us with a real estate representative a half-day exploration in the neighbouring communes. No commitment, promised, it is just to see.

We were in autumn 2012, the weather was still fine. Visits continue, two then three - nothing very convincing for Monique. Her criteria are certainly formally respected, ground floor, surrounding land, proximity to the center, no more than gnn gnn euros, but no crush.

As a little involved driver, I have no difficulty in confirming her refusals - too small, too noisy, too close to the road, too far from the village, too rustic ... I can already see the sword striking in the water. The failure of the quest is not to displease me.

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<sup>103</sup> Penn-ar-Bed means End-of-the-earth in Britton language, which corresponds literally to the meaning of our Department's name - Finistère - which is indeed the Western end of France peninsular nose. The Arrée mountains are very ancient rocks located in the centre of Finistère, now culminating at some 500 metres high, which were volcanoes in very, very ancient times. Trégor is a maritime sub-region of Finistère located by the Channel.

I am well aware that this move would spell the end of my municipal ambitions. Each kilometre away is a handful of votes less, geographic infidelity is paid at a high electoral price. But I like my municipal routine. I got used to the moors desert, to the Ankou, to the goblins<sup>104</sup>.

The real estate also feels that things are not going its way.

A sale is not to be neglected in this dead season, so our guide throws an impromptu asset on the table. It is a stone's throw from the shops, just appeared on the market, a recent death, almost a new house, a little more than gnn gnn but it is negotiable. The family is in a hurry, since you pay cash, it's a big advantage...

So here we are at the Oratory of Plougasnou. Veranda with pink blinds sheltering from glances a bereaved family evacuating furniture. Except the owner, everything breathes alive in this house. As soon as entering, Monique has an eye that shines. She measures, she anticipates, she plans to cut down here, to reshape there, to arrange the floor when the children will visit us, my office in this angle, here hers ... She was on the edge of pushing aside the widow and the orphan to measure at leisure !

Three condolences later, we are at the agency, signing an offer for gnn gnn euros, and return to Brennilis.

I barely realize it, but I have just sealed my municipal fate. The offer accepted, deeds signed, scheduled works, improvements completed, we take possession of the new property in July 2013. Six months of daily round trip Brennilis-Plougasnou, one hour behind the wheel, rain, mist, frost, I should have given up ballot expectations. However, I let myself be convinced by a deputy who still wanted to continue. March 2014, we were defeated in the first round, no more choice than to get interested in Plougasnou.

As for Monique, she stretches on the ground floor. She enters into links through a cousin whom we learn by chance has too left the Finistère centre for this North. Monique has a garden to landscape and does not miss a single House for Sale program, living again and again this autumn afternoon when everything changed.

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<sup>104</sup> Central Finistère is quite a poor area. Little endemic vegetation, mainly small bushes or moors. It is also a land of legends, with the character of Ankou, the Death, carrying bodies on its sleigh, and the goblins or korrigans dancing at night on the moors.

## MMXIV CRIMEA

History, as we know, does not go over the same dishes twice. However, I am probably not the only one to secretly hope that the Soviet Union is not completely dead, and that leaders like Vladimir Putin or Alexander Lukashenko still hold the torch. This is how I like to read the events of 2014.

On March 11, 2014, the Parliament of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea declares its independence from Ukraine, whose elected government has just resigned, yielding to pressure from several months of demonstrations for the acceptance of an association treaty with the European Union.

A few days later, by referendum, the citizens of the new state decided to join the Russian Federation. Ukrainian troops withdraw. For the European Union, this is a pitiful end to the showdown it believed it could engage with the Russian Federation by luring the Ukrainian government into a reversal of alliances cutting them off from their eastern neighbour.

Ukraine's position on the strategic chessboard had previously been ambiguous, including during the Second World War. An independent republic of Ukraine was then briefly created in 1941 to support the armies of the Reich in their attempt to invade the Soviet Union. Some of the actors in the 2014 movements also clearly claimed to be collaborators during the Nazi offensive.

In a Ukraine dominated by particularly anti-Russian and anti-communist forces, there is no surprise that Crimea asserts a right to self-determination. The peninsula had for a long time benefited from a statute of broad autonomy including in the newly independent Ukraine, of which it was only part because of a redistribution internal to the Soviet Union that occurred in 1954, on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the reunification of Russia and Ukraine.

The arguments justifying the reverse passage are therefore solid, and the popular vote does not contradict them.

However, protests against what is described as an attack by Moscow were strong and manifold in Western Europe and the United States. The intangibility of the borders was invoked loud and clear by those who otherwise wanted the dismantling of Yugoslavia, supported the creation of Kosovo, supported Israeli expansionism, sparked the Republic of Biafra, encouraged the Tibetan or Uighur secessionists, upheld the counter-revolutionary movements after the independence of former Portuguese colonies and promoted so many other sprains to the established territorial order, sprains considered as legitimate as soon as money forces found their interest therein.

This double standard policy questions - *do what I say, not what I do*. It is surprising that it persists after the fall of the Soviet Union in a context where, after all, the Putin government does not claim to be more socialist than the American rulers when they openly foment against the legitimate leaders of Cuba, Grenada, Panama, Chile, Venezuela...

It is as if the Iron Curtain would still exist in the minds of Western leaders. While Czarist Russia was courted by the other states, modern, post-Soviet Russia is feared and set aside. As if the ideal of the USSR, to build a world which would not obey the logic of subservience of the political to the powers of money, had survived its collapse.

Contemporary Russia is certainly not a socialist power. But it could quickly become a rallying force for States and for peoples refusing the absolute domination of private profit logics which appears as less and less compatible with the effective pursuit of common good. China, a quiet superpower in the making, has well understood this. In recent years China has established partnerships with Russia all the more solid since the latter sees it as counterbalancing the vain European temptations to seclude it.

Crimea becomes, in this configuration, the bridgehead of a new world order being built between the Ural and the Himalaya.

## LXV RAMALLAH

Solidarity with the Palestinian people is one of my constants. Already in 1967, the Six-Day War had fragmented the quintet of permanent friendship which united us within the Rodin high school - there were Bernard, Bertrand, Jean-Pierre AKA Biké, Pierre and me. One of us did the mistake of acknowledging some justification for the Israeli aggression, immediate ostracism as a result. It was total only for a short period of time, high school creates healing promiscuities, but that one never really joined back our core. Curiously, three of the five became doctors or biologists. Was there atavistic porosity attracting Gwenaël then Madenn on this same path? I do not know, and get afar from my narrative ...

In short, when I was contacted, at the end of summer 2013, to replace at short notice a project manager who gave up after a few months - reform of the social assistance system in Palestine - I did not hesitate too long to accept. Monique urged me on it - If you want, she said, you have to do it! -. The Association France Palestine confirmed to me that I would work with a "*good*" ministry, meaning a non-religious ministry.

So here I am in early October 2013 disembarking in the early hours at Tel Aviv airport (no direct transport to Ramallah, the formerly occupying power did not want it; a point in common with Andorra). I show my supporting documents to the Israeli Cerberus, a young woman who raises her eyebrows and wishes me good luck. An Arab taxi from Jerusalem greets me in the hall. It brings me in a few dozens of minutes to the heart of the former occupied territories. Not a roadblock, not a control, to wonder why all these stories one hears. Just a sign at a crossroad strongly advising Israeli residents not to pass this limit for their own safety. It is barely five o'clock in the morning, I attribute this easy movement to the dawn barely pointing. I then learned that, on this West side, the difficult thing is not to enter Palestine, but to leave it, while in the East, towards Jordan, it is the opposite: the Israeli army, which controls a foreign border through occupying a bridge lets everything out, but filters the entrances with a tight mesh.

Ramallah who is not awakening yet looks to me like a big village in the far South of Europe. White houses, tiles, a little dust when biting the crumbled edges of the asphalt tape. Royal Court Hotel, small, family-run. It had to be temporary, in fact I never stayed anywhere else. Two hours of sleep and en route for office management, meet the project team, men and women, scarf and no scarf. The routine is taking place. I spotted the Chinese Embassy, not far away, just after the Jasmine Café and the Mazen supermarket - it's from there, I make a mental note, that I should get my visa for Rabbit weeks,



China Airlines, Tel Aviv - Beijing direct. No time to act ... I only held four months, in as many stays.

Of course, I got to know the city. One walks it easily. Altitude prevents the heat and even lavished us in January with exceptional snow. Traffic blocked for a few days under a meter of packed snowflakes. I noticed that nothing was lacking in Ramallah, up to the car rental with Israeli plates delivered on site. I appreciated solid people, living their confinement with a dignity ignoring the outside. I found, commissioned by the France Palestine association of Central Finistère, the spokesperson for the refugee camps who had visited Carhaix a few months earlier. I accompanied her to her home in Hebron, two hours for 42 kilometres, we had to get around the roadblocks. I shared the evening, the food and the lodging of a family whose courage and resilience deserves tears of admiration. Thanks to a German Arabic-speaking colleague I was able to spend weekends outside the walls. Jerusalem, Jericho, the Jordan, the Dead Sea. Crawl an Israeli park on a Shabbat day and realize that, for fear of religious reprisals, the restaurant only served cold meals in the dark. Visit the old holy city, move aside in front of ultra-Orthodox families rushing quilts to the wind and hat lowered with the certainty of the chosen one, "the cover and the lodging of a family whose courage and resilience draw tears of admiration. Thanks to a German Arabic-speaking colleague I was able to spend weekends outside the walls. Jerusalem, Jericho, the Jordan, the Dead Sea. Crawl a park on a Shabbat day and realize that, for fear of religious reprisals, the restaurant only served cold meals in the dark. Visit the old holy city, move aside in front of ultra-Orthodox families rushing quilts to the wind and hat lowered with the certainty of the chosen one, "*self-confident and domineering*"<sup>105</sup>. I strolled in the big central market of Jerusalem, visited the delicatessen where innovative Russians make and sell pure kosher pork... Also, I paid tribute to Mahmoud Darwish, the great Palestinian poet, to Yasser Arafat, the federator, the combatant, I followed the instructions, such day, such hour, to avoid going out, one expects an Israeli raid. I smiled at the maid, turban veil, no words in common but a silhouette. I smelled the scent of knowledge on the superb campus of Birzeit University. I shared the bread, the salt, the falafel with people of exceptional culture, modesty, hospitality and tolerance, people grateful to me for being by their side, people that I admired without really knowing why.

In short, I had grown accustomed to the point of writing, for the experts to come, a small guide to Ramallah on a daily basis which, I believe, always does useful work to convince those who hesitate to take the step of a brief

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<sup>105</sup> Quotation from a description by General de Gaulle of the Israeli people, which attempts to dominate the region to the detriment of its neighbours and of the Palestinian people he opposed.

mission or to help those who, preparing for their arrival, would like to know where they will set foot.

I do not know what the trigger was leading me to give up. It was in February 2014. I used the upcoming elections as an apology, explained that I would serve Palestine better as an elected representative of the Left Front than as a technical official, bullshit that the Ministry made me the friendship to accept, even if they were surprised at the importance I attached to the three hundred voters of Brennilis - I did not inform them of my failure.

Our project was next to another, focusing on the plight of children imprisoned in Israeli jails.

His manager was also French. He lived in West Jerusalem, the "*disarabized*" part of the city, made daily trips by car, preferring the road to the lack of space in the urban territory of Ramallah. In a confetti state, it is easy to reach the limits of its puck. We had sympathized, there again through the German colleague, and shared a Cheese & Wine evening on the terrace at Notre Dame.

In January, he did not return from vacation. Israeli police blocked him at Tel Aviv airport, repatriated to Paris without further trial, as a reward for his declared hostile zeal. I certainly did not want to experience the same mishap, which I think would not have failed as long as someone scratched my badly hidden sympathies.

Also, I could not bear the state of mind whose obsession seemed, for some, to go to breeze the air of the oppressor to better serve the oppressed. I made it a point to never go to Jerusalem on my own initiative. Hedonistic recklessness forgot too quickly the humiliations, the wall, the arrogance, the bigotry badly assumed that drew on Fridays towards the Palestinian Territories so many Israelis braving without any real risk the prohibition of circulating to taste in peace the fresh beer or the hot meal that the skullcap banished from their homes.

I refused hypocrisy but, at the same time, I was not a martyr for the cause. Even if I appreciated the value attached by my Palestinian colleagues to the permanent pass that some held, even if I understood the enthusiasm of those who could go for a shopping visit to IKEA from behind the wall, even if I heard the taxi drivers tell me about the tolerance of Tel Aviv so different from the macho proselytes of the haredim<sup>106</sup>, there seemed to me to be a

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<sup>106</sup> Haredi Judaism consists of groups within [Orthodox Judaism](#) characterized by a strict adherence to traditions, as opposed to modern values and practices

flavour of collaboration in visiting the occupier to distract oneself from the occupation.

The principle was good, but the practice austere. So I quickly gave, both with relief and with regret. My successor was quickly found, we had worked together in China. I was able to welcome him to Ramallah, to share with him two days of briefing, making him visit the recesses of the small town, his large carcass struggling to get out of the jerky polo rental. The torch was passed into the right hands - he was able to carry it with dignity over the course of three years.

I had deserted - and I was safe, cowardly free to frolic elsewhere.

MMXV

## MURDERS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Migrations established Western civilizations. How many French people still know that the name of our Nation, of which we are so proud, is that of a German tribe, irredentist of the Gauls? And how many are aware of the fact that the Mediterranean, our nourishing sea, signals by its name that it is a link between the lands, and not a separating chasm? This ignorance, this rejection of history, now has a murderous taste.

On April 12, 2015, a boat carrying 550 migrants sank 24 hours after its departure from the Libyan coast. 400 dead, 150 survivors. The previous three days Italian coast guards had already rescued 5,629 migrants on 22 different boats. The International Organization for Migration has identified nearly 17,000 people dead or missing in the Mediterranean between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 and 30 July 2018 making it, according to the IOM, *"the deadliest migration route in the world."*

The migratory peak, caused by the persistence in Syria of armed attempts supported by the Western powers to destabilize the government, will result in 2015 in the entry of one million refugees into the European Schengen area. This flow will persist, but gradually fall to a much lower level, dropping down to just 120,000 people in 2018. One would have thought that Europe, largely responsible directly or indirectly for this humanitarian crisis, as an aging continent in search of qualified labour, would have known how to seize this opportunity to put forward its humanist values, while welcoming all refugees thronging at its gates.

Their numbers were anyway obviously far from representing an unsustainable burden for the community.

Europe counts on 750 million inhabitants. Receiving 1 million would certainly not be commensurate to the effort required, for example, in 1962 to also repatriate 1 million people from Algeria in a metropolitan population of 45 million.

However, the European reaction was quite different with the exception of Germany.

The German government began by seeing the economic and social opportunity represented by the arrival of a young population and skilled labour, before retracting under the pressure of the most xenophobic fringe of its public opinion, part of its traditional electorate.

European leaders therefore engaged in shameful haggling over the distribution of new arrivals, bargaining with refugees' packaging like about cattle.

The Community has placed the full weight of welcoming on the border regions of the European area, the weakest economically. This indignity continued five years later with quibbling around the reception of shipwrecked men gathered on board by courageous captains forbidden to dock.

The so-called migration crisis has punctuated the loss of credibility of a Europe that was once a melting pot for human rights, solidarity and brotherhood. This Europe, designed to be fraternal in overcoming wars, has turned into a conglomerate of selfishness, individualism and withdrawal.

Mutual aid has been reduced to such an extent even if, paradoxically, the means are increasing that would provide for emergency needs, the magnitude of which would not be exceptional compared to what other continents endure or have endured at other times.

As CIMADE (Inter-movement Committee for Aid to Evacuees) notes, "*Among international migrants, only a third have moved from a developing country to a developed country. In fact, contrary to what current discourse suggests, the majority of migrations do not take place from the South to the North. In reality, only 37% of global migration takes place from a developing country to a developed country. Most migrations take place between countries with the same level of development: 60% of migrants move among developed countries or among developing countries.*"

There are 740 million people migrating inside their own country year after year, against 200 million international migrants. Of these 200 million, only a third go to developed countries. Among them there are

15 million refugees of which only 20% or 3 million leave their region of origin.

It is Europe's shame not to have responded to those, in great distress and in fatal danger, who asked for its help, and to have literally watched them die in the waters of the Mediterranean – while the poorest regions actually bear the bulk of the solidarity burden over the years.

*"Of course, my love, we're going to cross; Of course, my love, do not doubt; Of course, my love, we will get there; We love each other so much together, we're going to win..."*<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> From Jean-Louis Aubert, French singing artist, *"Of course"*, November 2019

## LXVI NATASHA

Anyone who has read the chapter about my fiftieth birthday knows that. I had met Natasha in Belarus, in the splendour of her thirty-fifth year. We had seduced ourselves using Slavic gibberish.

We had quite a lot in common during these Moscow years. The power of decision and some funds from United Nations helped in conviviality. I was with Natasha in Minsk, in Mir, on the Berezina, much more often than what would actually be necessary to supervise the project for which she was nationally responsible; we were also in Kiev, in Leningrad, even in Geneva where my divine convenience declared her a high level expert whenever I was in charge.

Natasha is beautiful, she is young. Her deep voice, her smile, the blue of her eyes. We understand each other with half-words, we know how to share moments of relaxation. River-boat on the Dnieper or across Lake Geneva, visit mitten in mitten throughout the old Minsk, train out of Montreux hillsides, bastions of Saint Petersburg. She even introduces me to a few card games prelude for brief hugs. Natasha is not a sex addict, nor is she very enterprising. She receives, I believe with pleasure, if not with duty, and me who, without Rabbit, does not ignite the sheets, I am delighted and thankful to her.

Then life took its course, separation, other routes, definitive absence. This is what I tell myself when sorting out the well-behaving photos that brought us together for official poses.

Then one day - the message. Cyrillic in my mailbox.

Belarus has evolved, Facebook prevails, Google allows you to go up all the tracks. Natasha, who was looking for me, has found my trace! Skype is our ally, as it was that of the Rabbit and a few others. I discover her on my screen one afternoon of August 2013. I isolated myself in my office on the first floor, door closed, window closed, so that no one and especially Monique become aware of my return to the bliss of yesteryear.

In Plougasnou, the optical fibre facilitates exchange, image and sound perfect. Natasha has just returned home; her husband is not there yet. The weather is nice and warm in Minsk, she changed her clothes. Short-sleeved blouse with slightly open neck, denim shorts moulding endless legs whose shape I had forgotten. I am speechless with so much youth and beauty. I take a deep breath and ask her to please stand up, to walk for me. To be

sure that I do not dream this return to a future which in a smile Natasha announces brilliant.

From then on, it was on a daily basis that we regained confidence. Monique was surprised to hear my door close every late afternoon. She caught us once, having managed to climb the stairs without too much breathlessness and to open the door to which I turned my back. Natasha had detected the presence and plunged under her table to escape the matrimonial eye. It cost me convoluted explanations which I based on preparatory contacts for a fictitious project. "*Hiding? Hide whom? Hide what?* "

As soon as my space was freed, I rearranged it, pulling and pushing the furniture to sit from now on facing the door. If Monique doubted, she was comforted by this charivari, but she took it. Natasha and I were therefore able to continue our policy of rapprochement.

It took a moment, and it needed a place. She chooses Spring, I proposed Istanbul. Visa at the airport for Belarusian citizens, I knew a little about city having stayed there with Rabbit the previous year. I assure Natasha that she will not have to wear a veil or a scarf, and we meet in the arrival hall. Taxi, I reserved two rooms, this surprises the manager of the Aslan hotel.

It is dark early this mid-March. We dine around for fear of getting lost in the maze of Sultan Ahmet. Back to the rooms, time for decision. I suggest a game of cards - it will be in the half suite that I have booked for myself.

Natasha joins me, I guess the nightie under the dressing gown. The cards were not even dealt - there was impatience, there was an embrace. She feels my vigour, whispers "*preservative*". I had some, acquired at Roissy. I confess that I don't know how to put them on, she is not an expert either, we end up making do with it, and then, I go flaccid. Irremediable. Cialis taken in advance, perfect beauty of Natasha, nothing helps; she will have to finish me by hand, excluding rubber. She says it's nothing, leaves me to my poor performance, back to her own room.

I am ashamed the next day to knock at her door for breakfast on the terrace overlooking the Bosphorus. I am certain of the disastrous effect of my collapse on her desires to reconnect - but no shadow on Natasha's smile. The stay continues in charm and in pleasure, day discovery of Istanbul magnificence, and hard work in the evenings. We have given up on the idea of latex, but I can still rarely honour her without manual help. Each night, after disgorging, Natasha withdraws to the other side of the corridor.

Not any one is a Rabbit, and the one giving way inspires me more than the Slavic reserve. The week however passes more than pleasantly. The great hall of Atatürk Airport sees us exchanging the oath to continue and to deepen our Reconquista. I promise, sincere and flattered, Natasha is sublime, strict



skirt, short-sleeved top, fringed jacket for an executive woman, hint of lipstick, make-up - she may be having a meeting when she arrives, or her husband is waiting for her for an anniversary.

As for me, Paris, Plougasnou, a week and I leave to Rabbit. Monique does not want to see right through a trip motivated by the follow-up with a Chinese group of the week of studies that I had just organized for them in Turkey with the Sosyal Sigortalar Kurumu.

Second Natasha attempt, July 2014, Minsk. Reason this time invoked: the fifteenth anniversary of the social security reform in Belarus to which our project has contributed so much. I even forge a false invitation letter with the letterhead of the ministry, in case Monique decides to unseal her eyes.

Minsk, modernized, is superb. The apartment I rented there in Centralnyi Rayon, not very far from the Ministry where Natasha officiates, lacks nothing. She came to pick me up at the airport. Return by bus and tram to the city center, plus a few hundred meters to roll the suitcase. I prefer the Beijing lavish where Rabbit welcomes me at the wheel of her Audi!

Natasha's rules are also austere. No evenings, no nights, her husband would frown; during the day, she must attend to her job - but otherwise, every niche in the world! Introit in a hurry, I honour to the end in the heat of the city. She leaves me after briefing for evening activities. Lonely dinner at the supermarket cafeteria, a stone's throw away, just on the other side of the ring road, I will also be able to acquire roubles there and provide myself with the essentials for breakfast, see us tomorrow evening. The next day, I rediscover Minsk, the squirrels, the lakes, the bicycle rentals that I promise to frequent. I smile in the sun and at Natasha who is waiting for me.

July surprise: she took a late interest in skating, it's very close, ice rink in a shopping mall. I accept, this is unreasonable. Well above 30 years that I skated last, but I still see myself as an outfielder!

Barely on the shoe bench, Natasha realizes that I am not exactly up to her expectations. It is her who stretches the laces and tightens the knots to avoid any ankle flutter, it is her arm that I take to stammer my first steps. Very quickly, crash ! A blonde Amazon strikes me hard and directly at the end of her toe loop jump. I fall and protect myself with a wrist that bends, gasping "*It's nothing*", but it was something.

End of the show. Natasha buys a bandage, some ointment, some sausages, mustard and bread, and we hobble to the studio where she twists my ankle. A few caresses, rest. She will take an exceptional morning leave, we will go to the district health center where she knows a doctor, this will allow me access. The doctor wonders about my ankle - but since I can put my foot

down, walk without grinning too much, it must be a sprain. Only one treatment: vodka externally, bandage twice a day. If pain, come back...

The rest of the stay suffers. I half-hop around, Natasha twists me morning and evening. We go out from time to time, circus, restaurant, caviar shop, squirrel park, but just part of the spirit willing: I had imagined my week more unbruised and less intermittent. I am relieved when she accepts a return taxi to the airport - cowardly happy to repatriate.

We will meet again, soon, we promise. In September, Natasha and her husband go on an excursion to Catalonia. She received a double entry Schengen visa for this, the second will be for us.

When I get back, I dragged my paw for another week, from bone repairers to ankle boots, before deciding to really consult. Double ankle-wrist fracture, *from Belarus with love* !

I never tried to put on skates again - and I never saw Natasha again either. Not that I hold her as responsible, only my inconsistency was in question. But from October a new project is starting which draws me to China and to Rabbit. A real presence, full of days all year round, the ideal springboard to finally jump into the arms of happiness.

I let things go bad with Natasha. We always skyped, but sometimes I found myself being unavailable during the hours at which I knew she would call. Our meeting was scheduled in Prague, January 2015. As I did not know how to break this bridge so marvellously thrown over a chasm of fifteen years, I had to agree to preparations. But the joy of being with the Rabbit was so simple and so good that I could not see myself developing anything elsewhere. It was at the very last moment that I withdrew - with the alibi of pneumonia requiring my hospitalization in Beijing. Almost true, I had had a bad cold the previous week.

Natasha did pay a visit to Prague in my absence. She sent me some pictures to show me what I was missing. Upon her return, a Skype message, she tells me that she loves me, that she misses us, that she wants to build. I am trapped in my too many lies, with no other alternative than to finally write part of the truth: in China there is a Rabbit, it is this Rabbit that I love, and it is to this love that I attribute the weaknesses of my coital heat with her, Natasha.

Natasha thus slammed orders me to erase all our links, photos and correspondence before forgetting about her. I deleted, but I still smile at the one who believed, perhaps too late, that we could sail.

## **MMXVI BREXIT**

Neither Europe nor Britain had fully agreed to be united to each other. Too many links were weak in the chain that lately anchored the British Isles to mainland Europe. Under these conditions, casting off should not have been difficult.

However, while it was on June 23, 2016 that the British voters decided by referendum, by a majority of 51.6% of the voters, the denunciation of the European treaties, it took more than three years for their Parliament to agree to ratify the popular decision as transcribed in a separation agreement negotiated between the Government and the European Union.

The United Kingdom had only joined the European Economic Community in 1973, taking advantage of the demise of General de Gaulle, fiercely opposed to the accession of a power he saw as subservient to the United States. In fact, British participation in the European Union was dotted with exceptions to the common rule, notably in the budgetary field. The United Kingdom was neither part of the euro zone nor of the Schengen area. It thus freed itself from a certain number of constraints accepted by the vast majority of the other member countries with regard to the protection of Europe's borders, to free movement and to alleged financial orthodoxy.

Despite this relative autonomy vis-à-vis the censorship of Brussels, the gradual extension of the powers of the European bureaucracy aroused within the United Kingdom a growing desire to regain independence. This became an electoral argument, the conservative candidate promising, once elected, to organize a referendum on the permanence of his country in the European Union. This consultation was scheduled for 2017; it was advanced in reaction to a statistical adjustment by the European Commission in GDP calculation method which would have mechanically led to a substantial increase for the British contribution to the Community budget.

Nothing that could not have been negotiated. It is therefore for almost nothing that the house of cards will have collapsed.

Certainly, the result of the British vote appeared to some as narrow, and the small majority for the withdrawal is the arithmetical result of strong support, and strong opposition. Voters in Scotland (62%) and Northern Ireland (55%) did not vote for Brexit, with the distant or near history of these two nations explaining why. Older people seem to be more in favour of leaving than younger people - and the lower classes chose separation while the wealthier refused it, which was not a rational choice for any of these categories.

It is important to emphasize that, on this occasion, the popular vote ended up being respected and prevailed. This is all the more to be credited to the British institutions since this consideration for the majority vote is not a touchstone of the functioning of the European institutions or of the member states. The cases are not exceptional where the European authorities engage in processes of destabilization and overthrow rulers legitimized by popular vote whose policy displeases the American ally (Bolivia, Honduras, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Venezuela, Ukraine to stick to the most recent period).

The European Union itself sometimes has a lot of internal difficulties with democratic principles, as unfortunately illustrated by the Lisbon avatar of the European constitution rejected in vain by the people consulted, by the disdain with which the Catalan fact and its democratic expression are treated or by sealing the fate of Greece in the name of the "*Juncker theorem*" according to which "*there can be no democratic choice against the European treaties*".

The Swiss people refused by referendum to join the European economic area. By referendum, the British decided to withdraw from the European treaties. The Europe of the Commission is so discredited among an increasing number of member states, including, perhaps especially, among the founding members, that it would be risky to venture there to a popular consultation on the upkeep.

However, there is no evidence that the leaders, at least most of them, have taken the proper measure of this rejection phenomenon, have analysed its causes and are ready to consider ways to remedy it.

## LXVII RABBIT !

The threads are sometimes tenuous which embroiden the future.

Without a warning postscript at the foot of an e-mail of pure courtesy, I would not have signalled myself to the goodwill of managers looking for someone to fill a resident position on a project in China which I did not know existed. Selected candidate, interview via Skype from Beijing where I was on vacation for a few weeks this October 2014. The key question, for the examiners, was whether the candidates felt at ease with the idea of spending a good part of their time in China; reek of old suspicions! Seating there while answering, I had little trouble convincing.

Recruitment once earned, it is necessary to appease Monique. Her health status, these worrying difficulties in taking more than twenty steps in a row obviously prevent her from considering following me in a Beijing where walking and pollution would hinder her twice. I paint a picture where I would return to Plougasnou often - I did it, with so many back and forth trips over five years that Air France credits me with more than a million kilometres and includes me in the highest degree on its loyalty scale -, where Madenn will be close by, where the daily walk of Ulysses-dog will mobilize the one who, for more than a year, has been helping on his free time to maintain the garden clean, who will therefore visit her every day, where computer lessons by the one who became her friend, then her driver, will keep her hours busy, where Skype will join us every evening, image and sound - there too, I kept my word, sometimes under somewhat baroque conditions, at least for the sound, calling from the toilets of the restaurant where I had dinner with Rabbit before sharing the night -... I plead and I win.

It is the beginning of the sweetest time of apartheid. In Plougasnou, I go about and wander, choosing the dates of stay according to foreseeable events, birthday, bank holidays, elections, school intersession. In Beijing, it's real life: in office every day, every day at school to try to sinise myself a little better, despite the fact that being absolutely tone-deaf deprives me of the subtleties of the oral language. Neighbourhood routine, shopping, laundry, bike. Like any good Pekingese, I collect discount cards and abandon cash in favour of mobile phone payments.

In my street of the Construction of the Republic (south) 建 华 南 路 everyone knows me, and I know everyone. I am a member of the community, my moves take place nearby, crossing the road after a year, changing the stair

after four, not even far enough to need to have my consular registration corrected.

And above all, every day is Rabbit day. Lunch then dinner, happy Rabbit-Tiger hour from five to seven which sometimes gets extended, weekends if she has the time.

Because Rabbit does not have only a Tiger in the fire. Her parents mobilize her. They have aged since I met them some twenty years earlier at the foot of the tower where I accompanied her. They need care, listening, support. There is also the girl, returned from studies completed in Bordeaux then in Paris, who must be accompanied and driven back during her pre-employment internships.

Since the time she met me and sees me with her mother, Dong Dong - Winter Winter, that's her name, she was born on December 21 of a year of the Rooster - surely smelled the rat. But she says nothing, and Rabbit keeps silent. As if the mother feared that her daughter would judge her, this daughter because of whom she felt prevented from taking the plunge - delicate studies, no time to disturb her ... In China, each year of study is in fact delicate, as competition is fierce between students to integrate the right sector, the right institution.

This familiarity with the Rubicon<sup>108</sup>, I accepted it.

For fear of rolling Monique to hell if I announced a rupture to her, for shame to hurt when I know she already suffers, she suffers from aging, from being alone, from sensing a double life whose contours she fears.

During my installation in a half-time Chinese residence, Rabbit and I agreed to avoid hitting those with whom society matched us. Schizophrenia in apartheid. Rabbit has a husband, on whom she had set her sights in her university years. They are still married, living in a house large enough for her to be in a separate bedroom.

This husband does not seem too picky, nor cumbersome, even if sometimes he creates constraints that irritate me. Family dinner, visit to parents-in-law, drive him to work, honour the vacation in lieu of bonus, all expenses paid for the family ... Overall, however, I do not have too much to complain about the husband. Rabbit accommodates himself, laconic when she takes his call to confirm that she will not be back for dinner and will be late back home.

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<sup>108</sup> The Rubicon is a small river marking the border between the Roman province of Cisalpine Gaul and Italy proper. In 49 BC, Iulius Cesar as a general campaigning for the Senate did not have the authority to cross the Rubicon thus entering Italy with its troops. He did it nonetheless to take power from the Republic – since then to cross the Rubicon has the meaning of making a very strong, irreparable move.

Rabbit also has a sister, who lives in Shanghai and regularly comes to lend a hand to look after their parents. We then allow ourselves a few escapades, close or more distant, which 7/24 cause me delights but harm third party communication. I then invent for Monique a fable of a training center with internet accessible only during class hours, to justify calls at unusual time slots without image. It all works without a hitch, and this surprises me a little.

Hardly once did I almost get caught. Rabbit was to attend her daughter's graduation ceremony, a year of exchange between HEC Paris and the Chinese University of the People – Renmin University. We agreed to extend by a week for Rabbit and for me. Paris first then Provence, unbeknownst to Dong Dong and Monique, of course, not to mention the husband. We said, we did. Montélimar, Nîmes, Marseille, Nice, Monte Carlo, Menton, back to Beijing. For Monique, I was on a mission to Mongolia where the daily call suffered from the cold and blizzard, we were in December.

No problem, delicacies, back to Beijing. Barely a week - disaster!

Torrential rains had washed out the mail in Plougasnou and deprived of its protective envelope the invoice for the rental of the vehicle taken from Draguignan, returned to Marseille, which American Express had deemed useful to forward to me. The dates obviously coincide with Ulaan Baatar. It is from Beijing that I hiccup the surprise at Monique requesting explanation with real anger in her voice - What, surely an error, references, that I contact and blame them. I call back thirty minutes later with an incredible story: the invoices are based on the customer number, the procedure is manual, by entering the numbers two digits were reversed, hence the untimely emission for me of a piece intended for a sales representative who sailed by these places on the dates said ...

Wind of the ball, but I dodged.

This was how Rabbit years went. We loved each other, for ourselves and for each other. What good is it to tear the cocoon and fly away ? It's warm, it's cosy, no one sees us or guesses. The months, the years thus passed, without either being time conscious. The road was easy, the slope was very gentle which maybe led us too late.



MMXVII

NICE SICKLE BLOW<sup>109</sup>

I claim to be Catalan, without too much legitimacy. My father was born in these neighbourhoods, but our family cradle is located further North, in the district of Roquefort, the ewe's cheese with penicillin coating. Let's say we are fresh immigrants under the blood and gold banner<sup>110</sup>. And, like many new converts, I vibrate in unison with this faith in which I immersed myself, that of free and respected Catalunya.

On 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017, despite the ban decreed by Madrid who tries to prevent by force the vote, more than 40% of the Catalan electorate was able to vote and decided at a 90% majority for independence.

A first popular consultation was held in 2014 with 80% of YES in favour of the creation of an independent state of Catalonia. This consultation, organized without electoral lists for lack of central cooperation to its organisation, was declared null by the Spanish supreme court.

A compromise then intervened between the Madrid authorities and the Catalan government for the organisation of new regional elections which were to confirm the pre-eminence of the partisans of independence within the electorate. However, similar negotiations did not take place in 2017, and the declaration of independence following the referendum motivated heavy repression against the Catalan government and parliamentarians, many of whom have since either been imprisoned or live in exile.

New regional elections were held in December 2017, where the independence bloc retained the majority in the Parliament of Catalonia. Remarkably, this independence bloc brings together political parties of very different nuances between centrist, left and far left parties. The leadership of the coalition and therefore the formation of the Government has been held

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<sup>109</sup> BON COP DE FALÇ, Nice Sickle Blow, is Catalunya's national anthem

<sup>110</sup> Blood and Gold is the traditional way of calling the Catalan flag and coat of arms because of its two original colours. The legend says that the 4 red stripes were marked on a golden shield by four fingers of the Frank Emperor Charles the Bald in 870 with the blood of his loyal friend Guifried the Hairy he had just made Earl of Urgell and Cerdanya and who was wounded in a battle while helping the Emperor. In Catalan, the denomination is simply that of "quatre pals", the Four bars.

for several terms in the centrist party to which belong Artur Mas (referendum of 2014), Carles Puigdemont (referendum of 2017) and Quim Torra (since 2017).

The deterioration in relations between the Catalan leadership and the Madrid authorities is due to the invalidation in 2010 by the Spanish Supreme Court, referred to by the Popular Party close to the Franco heritage, of numerous articles of the statute of autonomy negotiated between 2003 and 2006, validated by the Spanish Cortes and the Catalan people who approved it by referendum.

The fierce hostility of the most reactionary fringe of the Spanish political spectrum to Catalan autonomist demonstrations is not new. It finds paroxysmal levels each time the alternation brings back to power the representatives of the Popular Party.

Catalonia was the last republican bastion against the Franco insurrection, and the refugees of 1939 largely crossed the French border through the Eastern Pyrenees into so-called French Catalonia.

During the dictatorship, the acts of resistance continued sporadically.

The last Franco political execution was in 1974 that of a Catalan activist, Salvador Puig i Antich. In addition to ideological reasons, the opposition to autonomy and even more to the independence of Catalonia is due to its importance in the Spanish context. Spreading over 6% of the national territory, the Community of Catalonia shelters nearly 15% of the population. Regional GDP represents 20% of that of Spain.

Catalonia has a very strong cultural identity, cemented around a language whose first written traces predate those of French, with the first written piece still understandable today dating from the 13th century.

If we take into account the fact that modern Spain was built on the marriage of the king of Aragon - whose ancestors had eliminated the kings of Majorca and deprived the Catalan people of their prerogatives - and the queen of Castile, it is easy to see that the desire for independence rests on much more than the economic

selfishness to which some have sometimes quickly brought them down.

While other hints of independence in Europe, the Middle East or North America, successful or not, have aroused movements of support, sympathy or at least benevolent understanding during the XX<sup>th</sup> and XXI<sup>st</sup> centuries even if the tutelary power opposed it - Ireland, Scotland, Palestine, Berber people, Kurdistan, Basque Country, Quebec, ex-Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Baltic States, Faroe Islands, Chechnya ... - the right to self-determination of the Catalan peoples seems to meet with very little echoes among governments, intellectuals, political forces and even the people, especially in France.

Perhaps it should be seen, as regards France, a diffuse fear of an effect of contagion which would risk weakening a nation where the secessionist temptations are present in many regions, although not in a very virulent form except in Corsica and in certain overseas territories. France as we know was indeed built from the Revolution on the rejection of local particularisms, seen as a reflection of feudalism that had to be put down.

The French Revolution was however also carried by a will of liberation of the people and the men. French leaders, at all levels, would no doubt be honoured to take a more benevolent view of the Catalan aspirations, which are, in short, to exercise as it should be the first of the universal rights of the human person, that of choosing his destiny- as it is true that *"The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government"*<sup>111</sup>.

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<sup>111</sup> Universal declaration of Human rights, art. 21.3

## LXVIII CRUISES

On the water, I am not too much of a boaster, even if I manage to swim pretty well in a basin or through not too deep waves. Going on board is not one of my favourite hobbies. Not that I am prone to seasickness or particularly molested by the scents of brine. It is rather the fear of vertigo, of the collapse of the bridge, of the irremediable fall in bitter chasms. A mild phobia like any other.

One day, however, around Easter 1995, we were recently back from China to Geneva, Monique came up with one of these offers which one understands it is better, for the peace of the household, not to resist. A cruise of the Francophonie, Alain Decaux<sup>112</sup> as guest star, the tour of the Antilles by Costa Cruises from Miami. Reasonable price for who can afford it, starting November. Water by then will pass under the bridge which still does not cross Lake Geneva, I agree.

The moment comes, no more escape.

A first night in Miami, waiting for the confrontation with the monster. The Costa Allegra certainly does not have the size of contemporary giants. 1000 passengers, 175 meters long, that is peanuts for who boarded a 15-bridges structure. But that is enough to impress me, whose largest floating platform I stepped upon was the hydrofoil from Saint Malo to Jersey. I feared confinement, boredom, crowds, isolation, fevers, heat, hurricane, mosquitoes, food - in short, I was afraid of all that was unknown to me.

I was afraid, and I was wrong. The eight days went by like an enchantment. Life on board, days that go by without realizing it, punctuated by a smoothing clock. Luxury meals, conferences, shows, walks from bridge to bridge, an hour or two to work a little on the few files that inflated my suitcase, a few words but not too much exchanged with table d'hôte neighbours. The stopovers, each time discovery of a new island. Jump from one colonial language to another, French, Spanish, English, soak up the sun, the sea spray, the flowers and the spices.

Was it for fear of being disappointed, for the sake of preserving myself from matrimonial ties that I wanted to relax or out of simple stinginess? Monique had to wait twenty years before I offered to cross the ladder again.

We will have sailed together four times. Caribbean anew - with Cuba, a Mexican island and a piece of Santo Domingo; circumnavigation in the Mediterranean, where Madenn and her family brightened the days; finally,

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<sup>112</sup> Alain Decaux (1925-2016) was a French historian famous for his TV shows and his popular books. He was Minister of Francophonie under François Mitterrand's Presidency.

a winter descent from Barcelona to the depths of the Canary Islands on a Chinese boat, from a travel company bankrupt because of SARS that had become Norwegian, therefore American, with his dragons, his life-size terra cotta, his casino buddhas. Like a wink before mourning, transition to Rabbit.

Rabbit who found time to share the following cruise with me. Our first big getaway where I did not need a ploy. A wide tour East of Marseille in a refinement that suits her so well - no rat on board, we don't drink or play, it would be mean to skimp on class or comfort. And as an extension, two days in Brittany. Meet Plouganists, Roscovites and Kélennoises<sup>113</sup> before finding Beijing back, finally public in a part of the known world.

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<sup>113</sup> From Brittany spots of Plougasnou, Roscoff and Kelenn, a beach near Carantec.

## MMXVIII IT IS HOT!

Brittany remains an oasis in the storms of global warming. Reasonable urbanization, a soothing breeze, enough rain not to run out of water but not enough to dissolve the sun. In Brittany, we sympathise when France heatwaves.

Summer 2018 has so far been the second hottest in the history of temperatures measured in mainland France. Sixty-six departments were classified as orange heatwave vigilance by France-Forecast Météo France with temperatures sometimes exceeding forty Celsius degrees.

This episode will have caused 1,500 premature deaths in France, which is certainly considerable, but represents ten times less than during the previous heat wave, in 2003. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, heat waves have multiplied, with in particular the 2003, 2006 and 2015 vintages each generating excess mortality of several thousand people, many of them very old residents in retirement homes.

Most of these deaths could have been avoided, with improved accommodation conditions in retirement homes, and more staff responsible for watching out for early signs of dehydration, staff whose number is notoriously insufficient to meet the needs.

The contemporary era thus generates its own contradictions. Increasingly frequent heat waves are occurring in the context of an aging population where fewer children cannot avoid the need for more parents being institutionalised, while governments that are more pragmatic than social are subject to European-based budgetary rules, regularly and ultimately considerably reducing the budgets devoted to long-term care, notwithstanding the recurring promises to seek ways to act better and differently.

In France, the heavy human toll - more than 15,000 dead - of the 2003 heat wave had generated various commitments on the part of the Government, with in particular the establishment of a Plan to be financed

by the product of a day of solidarity initially planned to support disabled persons.

One of the consequences of the heat wave will therefore have been a delay in the accessibility and layout of public places, which has relentlessly affected the autonomy of the elderly and clogged up residential reception structures.

The Government was thus able to rob Peter to pay Paul. The great misery of the EHPADs - establishments for the accommodation of dependent elderly people - was nevertheless perpetuated, which is above all due to the flagrant lack of staff in these establishments.

The cost of the stay would indeed reach, for quality care, levels incompatible with the amounts of pensions paid to beneficiaries. The meagre subsidies granted to responsible local authorities remain far below the amounts expected from long-term care insurance, a new branch of social security often announced but to yet implemented at the time of writing. One should know that already in 2016 the median monthly price in nursing homes for a single person was 1.949 euros (for services notoriously insufficient) while the average net pension was 1.399 euros.

The significant improvement recognized as necessary so that retirement homes do not become again the dying houses that some were still in the middle of the XXth century therefore requires a great abundance of resources. The recent episode of COVID19, which will have placed dependent elderly people at the forefront of the victims, sometimes dying in dramatic conditions for lack of preventive capacities and suitable hospital accommodation, has confirmed the diagnosis.

Hypothetical political decisions going in the right direction may one day be taken. Until they produce their effects, heat waves and other non-climatic events will continue to shorten the lives of the oldest in what has been described as "*EHPAD, a French shame*".

## LXIX WIDOWER

For three quarters, the year of her seventies has been a sweet one for Monique.

She had real difficulty walking more than a hundred steps. Something fatal, I feared, was looming. When I was away, rather now every other day than one day out of three, I understood from snatches of conversation that we skyped at night her growing dependence on Renée, computer teacher turned intermittent lady-in-waiting, and Joffrey, promoted from dog walker to the rank of factotum.

It was therefore necessary to identify festive punctuations that would be both pleasant and easy to live with. First there was this cruise from Barcelona. I had chosen a ship with a little less length, and a little more listening from the organizers. Cabin decorated with garlands for boarding on the day of her birth, master of ceremonies at disposal, club-style dining room, guides waiting for us at the foot of the bridge for tailor-made excursions. I think she liked it.

Then, at Pentecost, a surprise party concocted by the girls. Responded present so much of her relatives and friends, some also of her lovers who remained faithful to her despite the strained links of too much time passing! The surprise was complete, and the joy was visible. It was one of the few, and the last occasion we danced. The last time also when she took on the microphone to sing, with four pure peers from Beijing, this opus by Teresa Teng from which she had learned the Chinese words - "*You want to know how much I love you You want to know how big my love is My love, sincere, The moon enlightens my heart ...* », last taken on a Kara OK scene the night I informed her of my betrayal and my choice of Karen.

July, week of major tribal holidays, with girls and small children. A large Mallorcan house chosen for its immediate proximity to beaches and shops. The two of us had arrived a few hours before the rest of the group, the fastest if not the cheapest route. She had already been able to find her brands to welcome the new generations in these areas so often spotted on the internet that she commented on them in advance to the taxi transporting us from the airport. I had gotten used to her shortness of breath and knew how to take it upon myself to align my steps there, trotting on the spot as an alleged doddering man.

Monique looks a bit lost in the group photo from the last day, caught upon still waiting for the trigger from the other side of the pool. As if she already sensed the ways that awaited her. But for now, the future was singing to her. Barely back to a France just crowned soccer champion of the world, she scoured the sites to find us a tempting island for the summer to come.



For several months, however, she had complained of difficulties in swallowing, without any general practitioner or specialist finding the slightest basis for this persistence of an angina which was not one. In mid-August, I was back to China again, she finally obtains access to the diagnostic machine. Merciless CT scan - cancer, far advanced, of the oesophagus.

What surprises me when Madenn tells me this result is that they are surprised. I had done my research, for an unambiguous engine feedback. To the question "*persistent sore throat*" cancer figured prominently in the answers.

From then on, the sequences rushed. No sooner was a protocol in place that it was denied by the worsening of the disease. A tumour each day more obstructing cemented the obstacles, to the point that on September 12 the little robot in charge of planning the feeding by probe during the rays to come could not make its way.

Madenn, who has been bearing the emotional load of the accompaniment for a month now, warns me in the Beijing afternoon. At night I fly. She welcomes me in the morning, informs me that we can tomorrow Friday extract her mother from the nearby hospital where she was transferred back from the inoperative University hospital, home weekend before hospitalization at home. The weather is mild, we are enjoying the garden. Monique, without being spry, walks and breathes better because of the few pounds that her eating difficulties have caused to combine. She draws up plans for new flower beds with the gardener who has come to maintain the lawn. Tomorrow Saturday we are waiting for Gwenaël who will come from Nantes to join our weekend - the horizon seems clear for a few days or a few weeks of preparation for the inevitable.

I had concocted an itinerary which, over ten days, would have looped back a Tour de France of memory - my way of thanking by saying goodbye. The evolution will have compromised a project that I put in my pocket, not easy to pack a car with a medical bed. But at least I'm here. No date back to Rabbit who understands and knows that the festivities of 1<sup>st</sup> October would have anyway kept us apart for a good fortnight.

Everyone therefore prepares for another routine. Evening comes, follows night. And Saturday morning, crisis, asphyxiation, Madenn, lull. I go shopping, Gwenaël is due to us around 1 p.m. Madenn calls, aggravation, hospital, emergency. Remission, Monique is better, she eats and plays sudoku, I go to the reception to subscribe for the television connection, out of question to miss House for sale.

We leave her in expert hands to go and welcome the eldest daughter. The three of us will be back around 2 p.m., at half-past at the latest, after

lunch. Gwenaël got off the train, we form a cocoon with three lobes from which anxiety is banished.

Not yet had time to order from the local brewery when a call from the nurses makes us land again. Monique has decompensated, she is sinking, it is high time to join her. Ten minutes back, fifteen maybe, too late for consciousness. Gwenaël, who could not have misted her mother's gaze, caresses her hand to the rhythm of the respirator which still animates a hoarse breath - Madenn and I stay a little behind. Suddenly there is silence; Monique left us, September 15, 2:28 p.m.

The hours, the days that follow, the accumulation of formalities and preparations occupy time and thoughts. I am with the girls, then Gwenaël alone, Madenn joins her home where the children have been missing her for weeks, then just me with Ulysses.

We gave ourselves a week to prepare the farewell ceremony. At the day, emotion for all. In the meantime, tributes, guest book, phone calls, funeral parlour meetings that make me discover again the one who, year after year, was for half a century probably more my companion than I was her mate.

This Monique who has just left us, the one whose affection everyone tells me of, the admiration she had aroused, I do not quite know if I was good to her. Finally, this life of odds and ends, of blazes but of doubts and sometimes of sorrows that I forced her to share by accepting her wedding ultimatum on a Parisian winter fifty years ago, was this one of the possible good lives that the range of fate allowed her to ambition ?

I do not know, and since I do not know, I forget or strive for forgetting. I come back to Rabbit to discuss our change of state. One of us can now take all the steps. But what about the other one?

## MMXIX YELLOW JACKETS

The first episodes of the revolt of the destitute led in yellow jackets took me by surprise. Disappointed with the Red caps<sup>114</sup>, I was wary of another too bright colour. But very quickly, I recovered my reasoning capability. The crowds are the people. And when the people speak, we have to listen to them.

Between October 2018 and Summer 2019, a so-called spontaneous protest movement brings together in France, especially on Saturdays, participants sometimes in very large numbers to denounce a government policy indifferent to the difficulties of the popular strata.

Motivated at the outset by a change in the taxation of fuels, at the beginning essentially present outside large cities, the movement of yellow jackets - so named because of the distinctive sign of the protesters, road safety equipment which must be available in all road vehicles - spread by mid-November to major cities, including Paris. It has often given rise to attacks on the part of police forces obeying repressive orders that had never reached such a systematism in the contemporary history of social struggles in France.

During its first months of existence, the Yellow Jackets movement received considerable popular support with, in early December 2018, approval rates ("*justified movement*") of 70 to 85% depending on the survey institutes.

Even if these exceptional rates eroded in the absence of political perspective and of renewal in the actions conducted, also because of the systematically hostile propaganda prevailing in the most influential media, including the attribution to the demonstrators of violence of which they were in fact victims, a good half of public opinion continued to express support in

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<sup>114</sup> The *bonnets rouges* ("*red caps*") movement began in October 2013 in [Brittany](#). It was a protest movement initially targeting inequalities affecting provincial development, uniting a number of left-wing movements. It then evolved into targeting a new tax on truck transport (billed as a "*green tax*" by the socialist government) and fell under the influence of local private firms led by short-term financial considerations.

the polls. Support also manifested through widespread signs such as the exposure of a yellow jacket on the front shelf of private vehicles.

Despite constant provocations, despite police violence intended precisely, by their media impact and their consequences on the daily life of French people, to undermine the popular base of the movement, the Yellow Jackets were thus able to mobilize public opinion and largely keep its support. The bulk of citizens recognized themselves in fact in the expression of a revolt against increasingly difficult living conditions, against repeated attacks on the noblest social conquests resulting from the struggles of the past and especially against arrogance and the contempt of the ruling classes towards those who, by their vote, had given them power.

In this respect, the Yellow Jackets Movement is akin to the traditions of struggle running through French society over the centuries and across political regimes. The jacqueries in Middle-Age, the pre-revolutionary movements at the Age of Enlightenment, the vineyards uprisings of the beginning of the XXth century as well as, in certain aspects, the events of May-June 1968 could thus be historically attached to the episodes (or "acts") taking place from the end of 2018 to mid-2019.

These precedents suggest that, notwithstanding the attempts to extinguish it under a "Great National Debate" (December 2018 - March 2019), the conclusions of which have not really been drawn, a powerful fire undoubtedly continues to smoulder under the ashes of the Yellow Jackets. A new outbreak, of unknown power and format, fuelled by confinement and viral frustration, cannot be excluded.

As Victor Hugo wrote in *Choses Vues – Things I saw*, "the most excellent symbol of the people is the pavement. You walk on it, until it falls on your head."

## LXX DISARRAY

Imagining myself at the end of life is not one of my long-time hobbies.

This prospect came to me during a defeat at the municipal level following the abandonment of the Palestine project, out of public life by the back door.

During my evening dog-walk, I passed along the ground level studios provided by the town for dependent elderly. This is where I imagined Monique and me, the latter in an armchair in front of the computer screen, the other napping on the lawn, during days punctuated by visits from the nurses, from the canteen, from the cleaning staff.

Monique is no longer there. For some time, I fancy myself as a companion of Rabbit who would have taken the leap, resident of a luxury Pekingese retirement home, sharing a large two-room apartment bought off plan seven, eight, ten years ahead, for a deferred enjoyment at the price of the Plouganist residence that I will have sold, our combined pensions breaking all the ceilings of oriental comfort. I then increase my efforts to keep afloat my meagre knowledge of Chinese language and culture.

Rabbit is still on its bank but I am no longer opposite, at least no longer on this opposite of a channel that we could cross several times a week by the bridges of urban coexistence.

I had just found a rhythm of survival after the end of the activities of a project which, over the course of five beautiful years, had turned me into a Pekingese, capable, through intermittent supplications, to sigh out of love and try to drive the one who, perhaps, who knows, let us dream, will choose the turned-white-with-age's truncated future. Renewal of lease, tourist visa every three months, that was enough for the urban police to extend my resident status.

I was ready to continue to circumvent my love of almost thirty years - we celebrated around Easter 2016 our double zodiacal tour.

I was convinced that one day or the other, nearer more than distant, the last bolt would jump, that the ultimate pretext would no longer hold up, this care for parents preventing her, she said to me, to look into herself to find the courage for our new life. Winter-Winter, with her twenty-six years, would also have left the nest, the flight of the daughter facilitating that of the mother. It was enough for me to wait, to be there and to wear high the promises of us.

The crowned virus gets me down on my knees. To comply with the intermittent requirements of the tourist visa, each stay limited to thirty days,

I left Beijing on January 9, 2020. There were indeed some nasty rumours coming from 武汉 - Wuhan, the city Citroën, 雪铁龙, the dragon of snow and steel, this is the city of military bravery! - but nothing *a priori* that could make me doubt my return at the end of the month, after the festivities of entry into the year of the Rat.

When the time comes, Rabbit advises to wait - unpleasant circumstances, too many masks, too few distractions. I postpone, still time for Valentine's Day. Valentine is confined. I postpone, at least we will be together for our birthdays, both born on March 9, Rabbit fish and Tiger fish. No more flights at the end of February, Air France suspended. Then we confine to the West, to the East they deconfine but stay among themselves ...

Through Face Time - Skype is long relegated to prehistorical shelves -, Rabbit and her Tiger that I want to stay continue to exchange oaths of love and allegiance. Nothing, however, that resembles a date of meeting. Future is no longer a word that tunes our hopes. She remained coerced with her official family for eight long weeks of teleworking, and nothing imploded. While she was rebuilding her family, I only had for sharing bland images of a dog posing in front of an ocean that could no longer unite us.

Rabbit does not say it but the fear is there. With delays far too long, the imperial virus will have forced the choice. This choice was that of a family cell which proved to be impervious to harmful risks. Rabbit just lost her father, abruptly, sadly, unexpectedly. She now is more than ever bound by family ties, mother to care, sorrow to share.

From the heart of this bubble, Rabbit still watches a poor old love at the edge of the earth, fraying at the whim of adverse waves.

MMXX  
CORONA

Seventy years of history, of construction, of accumulated wealth and, ultimately, a humanity so fragile that a crowned virus makes it lose even the dignity of being together. Everyone for themselves, everyone at home, Middle Age here we are!

An emerging infectious disease , coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19), caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 , was reported in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan (central China) as an atypical pneumonia on which the usual treatments have no effect.

The Chinese authorities, scalded by the precedent of SARS in 2003, quickly take stock of the potential gravity of the situation. They act immediately at the local and national levels to contain the epidemic, immediately inform the international community of their interpretation of the situation, through WHO as well as through bilateral contacts at the highest level with the United States and European Union member states.

While the drastic measures taken in China seem to have had national effects, with, for example in Beijing, the percentage of persons cured exceeding half of the total number of cases in the month following their adoption, the other non-Asian countries seem not to have understood until very late the reality of the situation.

Badly or not at all prepared, delaying or refusing any collective guarantee measure for the population, under-equipped in terms of tests and protective equipment, having only very insufficient numbers of hospital beds equipped to take care of severe cases, these countries are victims of the classic development of an uncontrolled epidemic.

The cases multiply mechanically. On 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 China remained the main focus of the epidemic with 80,000 cases registered against a few hundred in European countries and even less in the US. A month later, if the number of cases in China has changed very little, that in the rest of the world is multiplied by a hundred

on average, by two thousand two hundred in the USA, by one thousand in Spain, 500 in Germany, 400 in France and 60 in Italy. These countries now all have more cases and deaths than China. In that same month of March 2020, the increase was only two and a half times in South Korea, a country of 60 million inhabitants having adopted very early general measures of containment, detection and monitoring.

The proven inability of Western countries to prepare for and then face a major health shock has shown the narrow limits of an organization of societies around a liberal economic approach favouring the search for immediate profit though deregulation, less State and outsourcing.

European mechanisms, built on the same logic since the mid-1980s, have shown their impotence. Everyone, and especially the great mass of the less privileged, had already felt in their flesh and in their mind the disastrous consequences of these policies for the common well-being. History and analysis has shown, however, that the current pandemic is only a small-scale model of what could actually happen.

The logic of collective and individual interest would therefore warrant, when the peoples will have to draw lessons from these events during the next elections, that the reins of power be entrusted to supporters of another approach, which would place the human interests above those of finance.

There is certainty, however, that this will be the case, so strong is the resilience of ruling classes and their ability to survive discredit.



