

Breaches In Time

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The crazy consultations of Dr. Afraid

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CHAPTER 1

First cracks

He takes out his handkerchief, mops his brow, strokes his eyes over the marble paperweight with its abundant female forms and glances at the diary. "The last one for today," he says with a sigh. The room is simply furnished. A desk in the corner of the window, a sofa, a Chesterfield armchair, a coffee table and a bookcase make up the furniture. On the walls, three paintings of spots and movements, authentically signed Rorchach, force the mind into symbolic contortions to keep its balance. Behind the desk, framed, is the diploma: "Sigmund Afraid, Doctor in Psychiatry".

He opens the window, lights a cigarette. Two floors down, a figure in the alley.

- One more to go!

The cigarette ends up in the concierge's geraniums.

The bell rings. Sigmund readjusts his tie and checks his white coat. A man in his forties, dressed in jeans, a shirt and a suede jacket, smiles with a half-smile. He looks like a shy child trying to cohabit with the adult in his role.

- Come in, dear sir! How was your week?

Proffe lets out a deep sigh, drops the jacket and settles on the couch.

- It is hopeless. School is useless. How can you teach anything under the current conditions? I teach a geography lesson on the political situation in Africa on Mondays, and on Thursdays, when I ask the students about the last lesson, half the information is already wrong. The regimes have changed, the borders have shifted, the country has changed its name... "No, sir," the pupils laugh, "this morning, Amin Bongo is running the country." History, science, spelling and even mathematics are not spared

from revolutions. I am unable to do my job, you understand? And the students know it. It makes them laugh. "Hey, you're out of the loop, Mister! It's okay, we're all out of the loop!"

Except that authority is not cool. Kids are uncontrollable. When I ask them to make an effort in their own interest, they tell me that they don't see any point in learning outdated stuff. The subjects are out of date. Current events are outdated. I am out of date.

- What do your colleagues think?

- Colleagues are as out of date as I am. The daily updating leads to exhausting discussions. Let's start with a student's attitude... Very quickly, we end up with various speeches on social, political and economic conditions. Everyone has their own ideas, but nothing comes of it. We leave the teacher's room more confused than before. In the midst of this mess, the directives for school reform are pouring in. Contradictory, preferably. The headmaster has his head in the sand; he keeps his eyes glued to the curriculum and doesn't want to know anything else. If there are problems that require his intervention, he adds two or three pages to the rules. Soon two volumes!

- What about you? How do you feel about this situation? What do you plan to do?

- Do? But I can't do anything! It's completely beyond me! Some colleagues are fighting to protect their prerogatives. But that's just pissing on a fiddle. Framework conditions will be added to the current framework conditions. And within the frameworks, what? The students will not care anymore, the subjects taught will be less and less relevant and the teachers will continue to receive the salary from hell. No thanks!

- But how do you personally experience this situation?

- Like a dead end. There is no way out. I'm trapped in a hellish machine, with superiors who are completely out of touch with reality, planning unworkable programmes and students who come from another world. I..., I am alone and I am useless.

- Everything can't be so black! You have a wife, children, friends, hobbies...

- So many worries! Since her existential crisis two years ago, my wife has been sifting through Chinese geobiology. Last week she had the toilet moved to the opposite corner of the house to, she says, harmonise the professional aspects of my life. She put my desk in the corner of the children's room, the living room became the dining room, and she wants to change the colour of the kitchen tiles. My computer is surrounded by anti-radiation crystals. I don't dare talk to her about my problems at work any more, because she launches into grand descriptions of the cosmic causes of the situation. She refuses to be challenged. If I try to argue, she classifies my attitude as a neurosis according to Han Singh. Three nights a week she invites her friends home to study people's problems, mine, their husbands', colleagues' or neighbours'. They love it. It exhausts me.

- Are the husbands of her friends your friends?

- I don't see them anymore. To escape the astrological shower, they spend their weekends in fluorescent uniforms, in a club of happy pedalers. It's not much better.

- Let's get back to you: do you have ideas, projects, desires?

- I just want to get out of this nightmare!

When the last consultation is over, Mr Proffe and his unsolvable problems are shown to the door, Sigmund Afraid carries out his end-of-day ritual. From the last drawer of the desk, he pulls out a bottle of whisky, a glass, and pours himself a large glassful. Then he glances at his diary, counts the number of clients he has received today, multiplies by the hourly rate and rubs his hands together with a small smile. For the fifteen years since he opened his practice, he congratulates himself daily on having chosen a profession spared from the crisis. He turns down clients, his appointment book is full for the next three months.

Yet today, he feels a little diffuse annoyance; something shadows his contentment. As if a piece of a carefully assembled puzzle had changed shape and refused to fit in its place to complete the picture. With a raised eyebrow, Sigmund considers this anomaly in his world without being able to grasp its nature. Could it be that the impermeable partitions erected between his professional and private life were leaking? This could

threaten the organisation of his life! Where could these leaks be? Would he too, like his clients, begin to be affected by his environment? On reflection, he must admit that he has had several fleeting concerns about the safety of his partitions in recent times - concerns that were quickly suppressed. Could this be a bigger breach than he had suspected?

Insistent ringing of the doorbell interrupts his reflection. His inner worries find support and confirmation:

- I don't have an appointment anymore! Who dares? In fifteen years, its never...

A second, even more insistent ringing of the doorbell. Disoriented, he opens the front door to find Archibald de Cresus, his banker and friend, with shaggy hair and a distressed look on his face.

- Ah, my dear Sigmund, I need to talk to you right away, I need your help!

- But... That is...

Without giving him time to react, Archibald de Cresus rushes into the study, throws his overcoat on the corner of the couch, and seeing the bottle of whisky, throws it to Sigmund:

- Pour me a glass, will you?

He then settles into the Chesterfield. Sigmund complies. Normally he would not tolerate such an intrusion into the organisation of his life, but the banker has just obtained the necessary credits to extend his chalet in Gstaad.

- Sit down and listen. This morning the board of directors gave me the results of an expert report on my sector, recommending that two hundred jobs be cut. It suggests that the management of the computer processing and analysis centre be entrusted to an independent company in India. The same report recommends the implementation of a staff motivation programme based on the promotion of human respect and individual responsibility. At eleven o'clock, a staff representative brings me a petition demanding the establishment of an ethics office to ensure the legality of the funds deposited in our bank. The employees also want shorter working hours and profit sharing. Meanwhile, the media is looking for every opportunity to set us up. When I went out to lunch, a journalist harassed me again, accusing me of lobbying for real estate projects,

demanding my testimony as if I were in the dock. When I told him that it was my job as a banker to work with money, he called me a hypocrite and a mafioso.

No, no, wait, it's not over! As soon as I get back to the office, I meet the director of the agency in charge of renewing our communication. He gives me a whole speech about the evolution of trends, and ends up proposing that we install internet cafés in our branches, that the counter staff wear fluorescent trainings, that we use hemp for our correspondence and that we devote 20% of our turnover to social works!

Crazy, I tell you! This is the last straw!

Not to mention the lawsuits, the backlog of cases due to bankruptcy, the ever-increasing number of nutters with lousy projects, the enlightened people looking for funds to change the world, the sponsored sports clubs who take our contribution for granted... No, really, it's all getting hopeless!

- I understand your exasperation, Archibald, but how can I help you?

- Maybe you can tell me if it's the world or me that's going crazy. For years I have progressed in my career, I have taken steps, I have taken responsibility. I have built up a respectable position. And now I feel like this whole edifice is disappearing under my feet. People don't care, it's the reign of anything goes. But what's going on, Sigmund? What's happening?

The worst thing, you see, is that in my life I have always been able to control situations, by making choices. But now there are no more decisions to be made: I'm stuck like a pickle in the sandwich of the system. If I take decisions in the interest of the staff, the board of directors falls on me, and vice versa. If I refuse to implement the recommendations of the expertise, I sabotage myself. If I do implement them, I am militating for disaster. There is no thread I can pull without planning to take it all on the head. Samson in the temple of the Philistines. I'm asked to bring it all down as if I'm not aware that I'm going to take it all on the chin... Since childhood I've been encouraged to carve out a place for myself, to strive for comfort and stability. And now, just when you think you've made it, reality slips out from under you.

Sigmund Afraid feels uncomfortable. The last sentences of his banker friend bring up latent worries. There are leaks. Leaks? Leaks! He has to make an effort to regain a professional posture.

- Reality is slipping away? Tell me about this feeling..

- It is like a dizzy spell. The things you have built your life on gradually lose their substance. Your social status loses its value. Your work experience is thrown away if the interests of the company demand it. Your morals look ridiculous to your own children. Clever stock traders ruin you in ten minutes. The world you have spent a lifetime settling into becomes not only fragile, as it always has been, but it becomes artificial, impalpable, unreal. What is left? Nothing. A void. A huge void. What to say? What to do? Can you see me in golf asking a player, between two holes, how he deals with the anguish of emptiness? Am I alone in this state? Do you have clients in this situation? How do they cope with it? How do you help them?

- They don't make it. There is no way out," replied Sigmund Afraid, surprised by a sincerity he had never allowed himself before.

My job is to listen to my clients, to allow them to unburden themselves momentarily. I help them to accept their situation, to enable them to continue to function in society. I have learned to understand people's problems, to guess the roots of the problems, but not to solve them. We make an inventory of their difficulties in living. They are taught the resignation of Catholic confessors. When they accept their problems to the point of being able to live with them, we have succeeded. You are talking to me about something else: the neurosis of our society and the existential void it creates. I am not competent. I can prescribe you anti-depressants, but the meaning of the world and of life are in the "Priests and Gurus" section of the Grand Bazaar.

Archibald de Cresus sees himself for a moment with a shorn head, a red dot on his forehead and wearing a white robe, floating in bliss.

- But this is crazy! It's completely crazy!

- That is what I look forward to every morning, dear friend. Unemployment for psychiatrists is not for tomorrow!

* * *

When he sees a small figure perched on his left shoulder, Sigmund's heart misses a beat. The little figure is about ten centimetres high. It speaks in his ear. He whispers:

- Sigmund! Sigmund! At last I have found a way to reach you! I've been trying to get your attention for years!

Sigmund tries to chase the apparition away as he would a large wasp that had entered his car. His car swerves. He narrowly avoids a collision with an oncoming van. Superimposed on the hooting of the horns, the little voice whispers to him:

- Be careful! It would be too stupid to fail when we have just found each other!

Sigmund finishes his journey with his eyes fixed on the road, pretending unsuccessfully to ignore the little man who continues his monologue.

- Don't be afraid, I mean you no harm! To show you my goodwill towards you, I will create a parking space in front of your house...

A whiff of sanity resurfaces in Sigmund.

- A car park in front of my house? I don't think so!

The miracle happens only once a year. He has put himself on the list of applicants for a space in the building's underground car park. Within five years he will get it. He arrives on the street and, with malignant satisfaction, observes:

- You see! Not a single free space and already cars are double-parked!

This fact comforts him. The unpleasant everyday life exists and does not lose its rights.

When he reaches the driveway, a car pulls away. Feeling dizzy, Sigmund parks his car, gets out and stands on the pavement, flooded with a stream of contradictory thoughts. Whisky, it is the whisky. No, overwork, maybe. Or meningitis - there have been cases recently! Or the breaches? Yes, breaches! The little voice :

- How long are you going to stand there? What a fuss over a car park!

Sigmund enters the building; he picks up his mail and heads for the lift, the door of which opens before he can even begin to press the button. "Hi hi hi" says the little voice. He rushes into the cabin and lets himself go against the wall, without bothering to press the third floor button. The lift starts to move.

Once at home, Sigmund discards his briefcase and overcoat, then, with his mind in turmoil, visits every room in his flat. An aspect of himself desperately demands the daily gestures: he opens the fridge, closes it, turns on the radio, takes off a shoe, starts sorting his mail, takes a bottle out of the bar, goes to the bathroom only to turn back for fear of seeing someone on his shoulder in the mirror, picks up the remote control and turns on the TV, goes back to inspecting the fridge, leaves the remote control in the ice tray and finally collapses in an armchair. He looks for the remote control, can't find it, repeats ten times the route he took before, without result. Seeing the bottle on the bar, he goes back to the fridge to get some ice cubes, finds the remote control, gets back into the chair and starts zapping channels frantically. All this while remaining deaf to the calls for calm from the little character hanging on his shoulder.

His eyes riveted to the television, he is startled: instead of the twenty o'clock show, the little character is gesticulating on the screen and his voice echoing in the stereo in the living room:

- Sigmund, will you finally listen to me? There's no point in running away from me, I have more than one trick up my sleeve!

Sigmund desperately taps on the remote control, to no avail: unperturbed, with arms crossed and a determined look on his face, the little man occupies the screen of all the channels. Sigmund turns off the television. The radio takes over:

- Sigmund, calm down! You might as well make up your mind: I've joined you and I won't let you go! Come on, Sigmund...

Sigmund looks for a way out. His gaze jumps from one object to another: the furniture, the windows, the doors, the knick-knacks, the paintings, all the things that, until this morning, made up a reassuring universe. From the Hi-Fi system pushed to full volume, the little character sends him the coup de grace:

- In the sense that you mean, they can't get away with it because there is no way out.

He is trapped.

- Who are you? What do you want from me? What is happening to me?

- One question at a time, please.

The little figure has come to sit on the arm of the chair. On closer inspection, Sigmund finds a family resemblance; an improved portrait of himself as a teenager.

- I am you, unlimited version," the little man continues. And I've come to wake you up.

- Wake me up?

- Yes, wake up. To clear away the mists that numb your mind. Dissolve the layers of bitterness and lies you hide behind. To dismantle the bubble of hypocrisy in which you enjoy yourself. Break down the walls you have built between yourself and life.

- No! Not the partitions!

- Especially the walls! Stop playing naive, you know as well as I do that your walls are rotten: they're crumbling by themselves! Open your eyes instead of shaking like a leaf, stuck in your cocoon of imbecility! Your walls! You think they protect you from the world, when in reality they've just allowed you to accumulate fears. Are you starting to get it? You live in a bubble filled with all your accumulated fears, and you seal yourself off night and day to keep them from escaping! What a joke! That's our sense of humour! Fortunately, this episode is over. We can finally have some fun...

- Have fun?

Shaken, Sigmund sees bits of understanding creeping into his mind. He discovers bits of blue sky through the gaps in his mental cocoon. His usual small world suddenly seems greyish, dull, anxious and particularly narrow. His attention imperceptibly slips through a gap into a space without partitions, vibrant with energy and creative potential. Shocked, he retreats.

The little character starts to laugh:

- Yes, old habits die hard! Your detoxification will take some time, considering the number of preconceived ideas you collect! Isn't it time to eat something?

* * *

After a hurried meal, Sigmund Afraid feels he can't take much more of this day and takes refuge under the sheets. On the bedside table, the little man plays with the hands of the alarm clock.

- Don't touch my alarm clock! I need it for my...

- Wake up? Don't worry, from now on, I'll take care of everything concerning your awakening...

- But don't you ever sleep?

- What for?" replies the other. I am awake!

CHAPTER 2

Breaches in time

- Sigmund! Sigmund! Ring! Ring! We rise!

Reflexively, Sigmund groped for the alarm clock and pressed the alarm trigger.

- Ring! Ring! Up we go!

The little character is crouched on his pillow.

- Hello Sigmund! You see, I kept my word...

- Get out of here! I don't want another day like yesterday! I want a normal day, okay?

- So be it! You just have to expand your idea of normality. Accept my presence and you'll have all the normal days you want! One thing is certain: I'm staying. Come on, let's make peace! You can call me Carl.

Sigmund reviews the last few hours of the previous day. He discovers a chain of circumstances against which he is no match. He remembers the futile attempts to escape, the surrender, the delirious dialogues. Memories of his dreams burst to the surface of his consciousness, marked by the presence of the little character, like so many sequels to the conversation begun the previous evening.

Perched on the toaster, Carl juggles sugar blocks. Sigmund loses himself in contemplating the bowl of coffee. A round of thoughts revolves around his head. Carl interrupts the merry-go-round.

- Ahoy! Sigmund! Finish your slice of bread rather than eat your liver! How do you expect us to get by if you keep on thinking hopeless and useless thoughts? You're going in circles! You might as well answer it now and move on...

First, I can reassure you that the people who can see me perched on your shoulder are the few awake humans on this planet. All the others are blind. Secondly, my presence will not sabotage your professional life. On the contrary, it will give it a new dimension: you will finally be able to help your clients. Thirdly, I am not going to turn your life into hell: it is already hellish with platitudes. Colour and joy will come! And finally, forget all hope of going back: it's impossible. Besides, if it's any consolation, all your contemporaries are in the same boat: the walls are coming down everywhere, on a global scale!

- I, Sigmund Afraid, doctor of psychiatry, am going mad!

- Welcome to the club! concluded Carl, with a deep bow.

- Do you want a parking space for 2 hours or 15 hours, asks Carl, who is busy scratching off last year's highway sticker from the windscreen.

- If anything, a 15 hours one will do... Sigmund replies, a hint of a smile on his lips, as he begins to discern some of the advantages of the new situation.

- But what kind of glue did those bastards use for that sticker? I have no problem moving a mountain, but this little piece of plastic resists me! Ah, there's your car parking space...

In the lobby of his office building, Sigmund is approached by the concierge.

- Doctor Afraid, Doctor Afraid!

- Good morning, Ms. Broom.

- Doctor, I've already asked you not to take my geraniums for an ashtray. That's a world! But what do I have to do to make myself understood?

- I understand, Ms. Broom, I understand! Sigmund rushes into the lift.

Once in his office, he puts away the glasses and the bottle, left over from his impromptu meeting with Archibald de Cresus. Then, sitting at his desk, he consults his appointment book.

- First patient: Josh Winner, a company consultant; this is his first appointment.

While putting on his white coat, Sigmund prepares for his first interview. Doubt returns to his mind:

- Carl, are you sure I'm the only one seeing you?
- Don't worry, everything will be fine! Besides, so far, nobody has noticed anything, not even the concierge, right? However, for your own comfort, I suggest you stop talking to me out loud. Communication by thought is much faster, more complete and reliable. Besides, it will prevent you from disturbing those around you...

- Sorry I'm late, Doctor.
- But... you are ahead of schedule, Mr. Winner!
- Well, early or late, it doesn't mean much, and anyway, I don't understand it anymore. Let me explain. I am a management consultant, specialising in time management. I also do foresight for several large companies: I study the major trends to come, the new markets that are emerging. Clients ask me for efficient methods and concrete development strategies based on verifiable data. They pay me to organise the progress of their business. One-year, three-year, five-year forecasts. I have become incapable of doing this!
- But why?" asks Sigmund.
- Because it's chaos! Clients are asking for rational solutions, but they are behaving in a totally illogical and random way. I had been working on a turnaround plan for a company for more than ten months when I hear that it is merging with its main competitor! This is just one example! But the worst thing is the time.
- Time?
- But yes! Time goes completely off the rails! Before, it moved normally, there was the past, the present and the future, we could count on it. Now, everything collides and mixes. Time starts to spiral inwards, faster and faster. At the rate it's going, the end of time is coming!
- Hi, hi, hi, says Carl in Sigmund's ear and he continues:
- I'm afraid I don't understand you very well; can you explain this end-of-time thing a little better?

- But it's obvious, just open your eyes! All periods of time replay simultaneously. It's like when you die, you know? They say that when you die, the film of your life is replayed at full speed. Well, we are witnessing the death of time. I'm finding clues everywhere. Look at fashion: all the past years collide on the catwalk. In music: nothing new, just remakes and compilations. The best of the 60's, 70's, 80's, 90's... Even worse, we're already compiling the best of the 2000's! And then what are we going to do? Well, we're going to publish the best of the compilations of the last few years. It's driving me crazy! And in politics, it's the same thing: it goes round and round in circles, with a cynicism that is more and more blatant as we repeat the same system. In art? ... Time has stopped moving in a straight line, it has curved. We are approaching the end of a spiral. What will happen? What will become of us?

Sigmund feels a wave of dizziness overtake him, while the stream of contradictory thoughts continues its merry-go-round in his head. Nostalgic thoughts as he realises that the id's, egos, oedipus and drives that made up his professional landscape have become obsolete, inappropriate and useless. Thoughts of rage at the conspiracy of concepts that confiscate the tools of his profession. Disconcerted thoughts as he observes the emergence of spaces devoid of any certainty. In his life and in the lives of his clients. Quickly, he pulls himself together.

- Yes, Mr. Winner, what will become of us?

- I don't know! If time collapses on itself like water in a sink that empties, once it's emptied, what's left? You can't become anymore! It takes time to become and to make plans! I feel like I'm having a bad dream in which the most normal things adopt aberrant behaviours...

Josh Winner is suddenly interrupted by a hellish noise. The doorbell rings and loud knocks are heard on the front door. Mrs Broom bursts into the room, out of her mind, a flower tray in her arms.

- What have you done to my geraniums? Eh, answer!

In the bin that the concierge holds up in front of the two men, geranium stems and leaves support flowers in the shape of multicoloured

ashtrays. Carl writhes with laughter on Sigmund's shoulder, who, feeling the giggles coming over him, gets rid of Mrs Broom:

- You may be a little overworked. Go and rest for an hour or two, and if your geraniums still have an ashtray head, take them to the botanical garden. I'm sure they'll be willing to pay a lot of money for such a mutated specimen of the geranium. Keep me posted, won't you?

Then, as the concierge is escorted to the door, Sigmund continues:

- You were talking about a bad dream impression in which the most normal things adopted aberrant behaviours...

They look at each other for a few moments, oscillating between terror and laughter. The balance broken, they burst out laughing and the conversation continues in a much lighter atmosphere. Sigmund continues:

- What is the problem?

- It is everywhere! We have built our society on the assumption that time flows in a linear fashion. Our very existence is based on it. Our relationships, our ideas about ourselves, our institutions, our economy, our businesses, everything! We have a history, a culture, a legacy on which we base our growth. Without time, there is no growth. I have the feeling that I am witnessing a conspiracy on a cosmic scale! The cosmos has gone mad! Unless...

- Unless...?

- Unless there is no problem! Unless there is a phenomenon that is completely beyond us, an upheaval of reality on a cosmic scale. A new order of reality that emerges and devastates our preconceptions beforehand; that explodes our conceptual partitions and our ideas about the world.

Suddenly, something clicks in Sigmund's consciousness. His attention gathers, his head clears and he feels as if lives of heaviness and seriousness have just fallen from his shoulders. Carl whispers in his ear, "Ah, we've just taken a step forward!" He takes off his white coat, offers a cigarette to Winner, lights one for himself, and without fully realising it, announces:

- The consultation is over: we have a lot to learn from each other. Please continue!

Josh Winner launches:

- In ancient times, in their paintings, people represented the environment in two dimensions. They had not developed the understanding of volume that we have today. Paintings show us flat landscapes and figures, without volume or perspective. It seems that their ability to interpret visual information was more rudimentary. In the course of time, consciousness has developed, allowing us to consciously - and no longer instinctively - interpret the environment and things in three dimensions, with volume and perspective. Until then, we have learned to master three-dimensional space: organising a volume, decorating a house, creating a landscape...

My feeling is that we are now reaching a new stage of learning in our interpretation of reality: the transition to four dimensions. And the fourth dimension is time.

- Are we going to master time?

- We're still in the early stages! But look at what happens when you create something in three dimensions, in architecture for example: you organise volumes by coordinating several surfaces simultaneously, by juggling different perspectives... Well, add a dimension, what does it give you?

- You mean, experiencing several moments of a life at the same time, like perceiving the different surfaces of an object?

- That's exactly it!" enthuses Winner. Until now, we have lived our lives as a linear sequence of experiences. From now on, we could become able to experience different moments of our life simultaneously. We could experience all these moments at the same time, as if they were different surfaces of a volume. This completely changes our relationship to time. Until now we have been conditioned by time, we have been trapped in it. Well yes, we are going to master time! But before we can do that, we have to get rid of all our ideas about time, all our habits related to time. Try to fit a volume into a surface...

- Shit!" exclaims Sigmund. But that's why...

- That's why all the walls and partitions are falling down! That's why history goes round and round! And that's why nothing goes right in this civilisation; all our societies are built on three dimensions. Even the human psyche is restricted to function in three dimensions!

As Josh Winner catches his breath, he gradually realises the significance of his speech.

- But I'm telling you all this and it seems so clear, so obvious... Before I came to you, I was in a state of total confusion, totally lost, and I find myself almost serene... What did you do to me?

- I didn't do anything to you, my dear, replies Sigmund. If it makes you feel any better, this hour of conversation has transformed me as much as you have, and I thank you for that! However, I have the feeling that the more one resists this transformation, the worse one feels. On the other hand, the more you accept it, the more you accompany it and the more joyful you become. You spoke about it with passion, and you are passionate about it... But between us, do you realise what it all means?

- I'm just beginning to discover this! It's hard to imagine a society of human beings who organise time like we organise an urban space. And then, what can it mean to live in an environment that is larger than time? All our ideas about ourselves will be transformed: what is a body outside of time? How does it feel to be a foetus, a child, a teenager, an adult, an old man, and something else all at once? This could be a winning ticket to eternal life!

- And then, Sigmund adds, what values will be important in this new reality? Money, success and competition come from a three-dimensional understanding: one accumulates temporal goods or power, and then? What can be built using time as a material? Malraux was definitely right: the twenty-first century will be spiritual, or something like it. Let's go downstairs for a glass of champagne to celebrate!

- Gladly, if you have the time...

CHAPTER 3

Cultural gaps

When Sigmund returns to his office after the champagne interlude, a young woman is waiting for him on the landing. She is in her thirties, with a pretty face framed by long brown hair and a pleasant figure. "She could be beautiful, if she didn't look so sour," Sigmund thinks, inviting her in while apologising:

- Sorry I'm late, but this morning time is playing tricks on me!

Isabelle Fineart raises a questioning eyebrow and follows Sigmund into his office.

- Make yourself comfortable and tell me what brings you here.

She puts her jacket on the couch, then looks around at the pictures and figures, as if to gather her thoughts. Finally, she looks at Sigmund, tries to put on a sad smile, and says:

- I just feel like the world is breaking down.

And she stops, as if this simple sentence were enough to sum up her dismay. Or, perhaps, to check whether the person she is talking to will take her seriously before continuing. The encouragement comes:

- What makes you think that?

- Everywhere, quality is gradually disappearing, giving way to an imbecilic uniformity. Dignity gives way to mediocrity, intelligence disappears under ready-made ideas. The world seems to me like a train hurtling towards an unknown and undoubtedly catastrophic destination. There are no longer any conductors and the passengers are all tucked away in their stories, fully occupied with not thinking. This phenomenon affects all areas of human activity: political, economic, social, cultural, artistic, spiritual. Everything is falling apart.

Another pause, another silent request for support. Sigmund raises his eyebrows questioningly. She continues.

- It worries me deeply: I go from anger to doubt, to confusion, to despondency, to indignation... When I try to share these feelings, I am almost always met with apathy, in different forms. Some carefully avoid the subject, others claim that I am delirious; the rest hide behind philosophies that are as grand as they are frivolous. I don't know who to talk to anymore, that's why I came to you. I don't expect you to do anything for me, other than listen to me...

Carl flails at Sigmund's shoulder, slips, catches himself on his shirt collar, and bellows:

- Hi hi hi... It's about to tip over. It won't take much pushing!

Then he jumps onto the carpet, climbs back onto the couch and settles on Isabelle's lap, who shows signs of surprise:

- What is it that...? I have the feeling of a presence near me! Something joyful?

Sigmund sends her an amused, almost knowing look and suggests:

- If I were you, I wouldn't close all the doors so quickly. Life is full of surprises and sometimes solutions appear where you least expect them...

- I'm afraid you don't quite understand: my problem is my lucidity about the world today. I have no intention of going to therapy to "cure" myself of this lucidity, I have no desire to waste time analysing my psychological reactions to the state of the world, and I have no desire to take medication to relieve my anxieties. In fact, my problem is that I feel I am sane in a crazy world.

- Rest assured, I have no intention of dumbing you down. On the contrary, I simply want to draw your attention to the fact that there are always several perspectives on the same situation. But tell me more about your life and your world. We'll see where that leads...

Isabelle Fineart can feel herself floating. For months, she has gradually isolated herself in a critical, serious, accusatory attitude. Her observation of the state of the world has made her taciturn and, in turn, this mood has darkened her eyes. Now a curious energy tickles her belly, like the beginnings of a desire to laugh, to wash away this gravity in a stream of

joy. On her lap, smiling, Carl shines like a halogen lamp. Sigmund puts her back on track:

- Tell me why you think the world is falling apart...

- But I just told you: all areas of human activity are falling apart: political, economic, social, cultural, artistic, spiritual... The American steamroller is ravaging the planet.

- Is that so?

- And how! The American way of life is eating away at the planet like a cancer! You only have to watch a Hollywood film to understand how serious the situation is. They are polluting the world with their stereotypes. The model of the American woman - or the American man - these siliconised versions of existence are so miserable, so neurotic... And yet, their goddamn hero worship is exported all over the planet. Even their economy is inflated with silicone, but they still make the news. I don't think there is a more frustrated people than the Americans. They're the biggest givers of lessons on the planet.

- You don't like to be lectured?

- It depends which ones! I have a hard time with interference, especially when it is poor. On the other hand, I am open to informed suggestions. But Uncle Sam's accusing finger, no way. They talk about the land of the free, but it's a psychic prison, a big pulsating mass of obsessions! Their health cult reaches the heights of absurdity: their health system makes people sick, their beauty standards make half the population anorexic and the other half obese, smokers are treated like plague victims and they want to teach us how to live? Help us!

On his knees, Carl followed this diatribe with a look of increasing dismay. To punctuate his last words, he starts pulsing blue, orange, and red lights, like a flashing light, opening his eyes wide. Then he pretends to vomit: an ectoplasmic torrent of filthy colours spills onto the carpet.

- What... is this all about?" says Isabelle as she sees the dark mass swarming at her feet.

- Let's call it a torrent of vomit on the world, Sigmund suggests admiringly. I suppose you are feeling better now. Would you like something to drink while I air out the atmosphere for a while?

- I can't believe it! But it's true that I'm feeling better: I feel like all my rage has gone into that blackish thing! I'd love to have a coffee.

Carl observes Isabelle, like a painter detailing a model. With a gesture of his finger, he sends two points of light that will lodge themselves on the lobes of her ears. Other stars form a halo over her head. Then, changing his mind, he dissolves the halo and makes a small rainbow appear that connects her two breasts. Satisfied, he settles down underneath and begins to shine like a sun.

Barely having recovered from her surprise, Isabelle feels a growing movement in her solar plexus; a subtle alchemy sets in, like a crescendo of appreciation and tenderness towards reality. While preparing the drinks, Sigmund returns to the heart of the matter:

- With the rage gone, let's continue our exploration. The world is breaking up: how does this affect you? Let's talk about your activities, your life...

Isabelle Fineart observes her reflection in the coffee spoon; she is about to spout the usual refrain describing her life and activities, but before she has uttered a word, she realises that the bitterness that usually punctuates her speech is no longer justified. The unexpected surge of affection she feels for herself causes her to reassess her situation. She laughs:

- I was getting ready to vomit on my life and my job, but the nausea has passed! Let me gather my thoughts...

She sugared her coffee, tried for a moment to synchronise the round of her thoughts with the movement of the spoon in the cup, then, smiling, returned to Sigmund:

- I am a journalist for an arts and culture magazine. Divorced, childless, loves travel, healthy food and nature walks, authentic relationships and big ideas.

- The breakdown of the world seems to have affected your private life as much as your professional life! How do you experience this phenomenon?

- I experience it as a growing loneliness. It is as if my disapproval of people's attitudes and the state of the world creates a distance between them and me. I have fewer and fewer friends: their stories no longer interest me and I have the feeling that they are running away from me so as not to hear mine. I am indifferent to sport, politics disgusts me,

evenings spent remaking the world seem sterile to me, jet-set gossip wearies me: I can't find the slightest interest in it.

Professionally, it's the same story: I'm supposed to be interested in events that, for the most part, seem fake, artificial and déjà vu. All I see are bloated egos rearranging familiar themes and glorifying their own genius. I don't mind writing it down, which is causing me more and more problems... She catches her breath, and says: My God! How bitter!

As he listens, Sigmund observes Isabelle wavering between an old resentment and a new appreciation for life. To tip the balance, he adds, in a joking tone:

- In short, you have invested almost all your brilliant intelligence in finding out what is wrong!

She considers this idea for a few moments and then acknowledges:

- It's true. I have become a real specialist!

- I can understand why you are so fed up: living in a world full of people and things that don't fit, it ends up taking its toll on your morale! Have you ever thought of changing the way you look at things?

- My way to look at things?

Sigmund feels like he is growing wings. Still so valuable the day before, his methodology seems obsolete compared to the treasures of inspiration. Still under his rainbow, Carl applauds. Sigmund continues:

- When you see a bottle that is half full, do you choose to see it half empty or half full?

- I would tend to see it as half empty!

Isabelle's pout turns into a smile:

- But... it's a matter of habit!

- Would you be willing to betray your habits?

As soon as he says this, Sigmund feels the room begin to shake. He recognises the dizziness that had already hit him so hard yesterday. An icy wave runs down his back, while another wave, burning, rises from the bottom of his spine. At the meeting point, the two currents explode in a deluge of emotions, sensations, images and multicoloured vibrations,

causing a shock wave that shatters walls, partitions, protections, beliefs, fears and hopes.

Immersed in this maelstrom of energy, he catches a glimpse of Isabelle clinging with all her strength to the armrests of the armchair. Their eyes search for each other, meet and cling, the last link, the last buoy in a psychic ocean suddenly transformed into a fury. The depths of their subconscious are pulsating with jolts that provoke a tidal wave of instinctive protest on the surface. Huge waves of panic break over the shores of the known, engulfing their reason, flooding all their daily reference points. Enjoying the waves, Carl mimes a surfer delighted by such exceptional conditions.

As they whirl around, their visual connection intensifies, strengthens, becomes charged with intelligence. Beyond concepts and words, they vaguely guess that the separation has totally disappeared, that the play of identities has given way to the one and indivisible experience.

From a distance, in the tumult, they hear Carl's voice:

- Obviously, your habits are all set to betray you - and even drown you!

The outside intervention calms the hurricane. Slowly the trepidation subsides and the masses of energy flow back, taking the fear with them.

Leaving his surfing, Carl sets out to build a new rainbow over Isabelle and Sigmund, who have been thrown together by the ebb and flow and are lying jumbled on the carpet. Still trembling, they release their hold and discover a transformed psychic landscape, free of the usual landmarks.

They observe the remains of these waves of panic which drip and evaporate in volutes of steam under the action of a growing heat. Gradually abandoning themselves to this heat, they gradually guess its nature, recognising themselves in a new perception, joyful and free.

Isabelle stammers:

- What happened? And who is this cute little guy who makes rainbows?

- Carl, at your service. Sigmund was asking you if you were ready to betray your habits. I must say that he has made remarkable progress.

- You assured me that I was the only one to see you! – Yes, okay, I get it, the partitions are gone...

He staggers to his feet, goes behind his desk and picks up his diploma, which he puts in a drawer, before sighing:

- It's impossible to do my job in such conditions! Then, turning to Isabelle, he adds: Did this session solve our problem of a decaying world?

They go into a fit of laughter that the ringing of the front door does not manage to interrupt.

Breaches in Time

CHAPTER 4

Religious rifts

His cheeks still full of tears of laughter, Sigmund discovers a tall, dry man on the landing. The way his head sticks out of his turtleneck jumper is irresistibly reminiscent of a male organ with glasses and a hairpiece. The small silver cross hanging around his neck, however, dissuades the observer from further ethological reflection.

- Come in, Mr Bigot.

When Sigmund arrives in the cabinet, he discovers Isabelle on her stomach on the carpet, deep in conversation with Carl. Turning to the clergyman, he continues:

- A succession of unexpected events has led me to significantly change the form of my services. I hope you will not mind.

Suspicious, Mr Bigot, wondering what he has been caught up in, grumbles an inaudible answer and, as straight as justice, goes to sit in the chair.

His suspicions are confirmed when, disregarding all professional confidentiality, Sigmund explains to Isabelle:

- Mr Bigot has a hard time with his libido and his fantasies, which he considers incompatible with his ecclesiastical duties. Before adding with a smile: "He doesn't really know which saint to follow".

Suddenly pale, Hector Bigot leaps to his feet and, waving a threatening finger, exclaims: "I forbid you to..."

But he cannot finish his sentence, because a powerful glow emerges near the door, like a fountain of white, silver and golden light. In front of the astonished group, the light quickly condenses and takes the form of a beautiful woman with large white wings. As she folds her wings, the apparition announces:

- Sigmund is right, Hector, you're liable to explode at any moment by denying your impulses... You'd better do something about them, rather than treating them like a shameful disease.

Hector's complexion has turned waxy. His legs give way, he collapses in his chair and stammers:

- Lord Almighty!

- Certainly not, I am your guardian angel. Please get over it, I have many things to say to you and to our three friends...

- Three?

The man, distraught, then discovers Carl busy creating a vesuvius of sparks at the height of his crotch. The little man comments:

- Simple safety valve.

He shakes his head, tries to dispel what he thinks is a nightmare, but the scene persists. He looks at Sigmund, then at Isabelle, but finds no comfort in their ecstatic expressions.

- I've gone mad!" he says.

- Ah, that's a good excuse!" replies the angel, with a crystalline laugh. You've been calling me with your prayers all your life and every time I send you signs and answers, you dismiss them as hallucinations. Just like your fantasies, by the way...

- How in God's name is that possible?" sighs Bigot, totally shaken.

- Let me laugh," the angel says. For years you've been telling your flock about angelic apparitions in the lives of men and you refuse to believe your eyes? No wonder they fall asleep... But I didn't come here to blame you: you do it very well yourself.

During this exchange, Carl completed his pyrotechnic artwork. In addition to the vesuvius, multicoloured suns swirl around the navel, solar plexus, heart, throat and forehead; another volcano erupts from the top of the skull. With an appreciative pout, the angel comments:

- Good work, Carl. He'll be up and running in no time! Then turning to the others, she adds: sorry, I'm just popping in unannounced, and didn't ask if I could join you?

Sigmund picked himself up:

- But with pleasure! Especially as you will probably be able to give us some insight into the events of the last few hours...
- Yes, please," says Isabelle. It all happened so fast...

The angel sits next to Hector and tenderly massages his shoulders. She takes a deep breath, remains silent for a few moments, then begins:

- Everything is indeed rushing. You see, what is happening to you is happening all over the place at this time.

With a nod to Sigmund:

- The walls are rotten, crumbling on all sides.

A huge smile lights up her angelic face as she adds:

- Finally!

She continues:

- Separation is an illusion. How many philosophers have described the phenomenon: the maya, the founding illusion that gives birth to the world of Man. But over the centuries, apart from a few rare individuals, humanity has remained captive to this spell. As proof, philosophers still debate the nature of maya, without realising that their arguments are based on separation... Today, this illusion is rapidly dissipating under the combined effect of the clarity of human understanding and the light of the higher dimensions.

Isabelle interrupts him:

- Human understanding ? Higher dimensions? I'm not sure I understand...
- By human understanding, I mean all the discoveries that have taken place in recent decades. Rational thought has orchestrated its own transfiguration... Space-time has become relative; the observer influences the thing observed; solid matter is a view of the mind; instead, a fundamental unity, an underlying organisation, is admitted: everything that exists in the universe constitutes the developed aspect of an unmanifest intention.
- But what happens to the individual in all this?" asks Sigmund, suddenly embarrassed by an identity he no longer knows where to put.

- That is your challenge!" the angel replies with a beaming smile. Until now, your ideas about yourselves have made you sick, mortal and cut off from the rest of the universe. You have been satisfied with painful, incomplete, senseless and mediocre existences, taking as your excuse that this is the known, and then deciding that the rest must be even worse. I'm not going to answer your question directly, because that's your job, but I can give you a lead. What happens to the individual when he leaves his mortal shell of limitations and pain, when he chooses to embrace the infinity of the unknown?

- But then everything will fall apart!" exclaims Isabelle, whipped up by a sudden gust of anxiety.

- It all depends on what you call 'everything'," the angel suggests, amused by Carl's feverish activity as he pulls the hose of a miniature Hoover from the top of his four-inch head and starts pumping out streams of dull colour that spasmodically flow from Isabelle's belly. She continues:

- As humans, you place an exaggerated value on beautifying your prison conditions; culture, politics and religion are prison disciplines, ways of making life more tolerable within these limitations. This 'stuff' will have to fall apart if you are to flourish.

With the Hoover working at full speed, Carl has left Isabel behind to work around Hector Bigot, who is wavering back and forth in an inner cyclone of conflicting beliefs. Greyish fumaroles shoot out from everywhere between his perineum and the top of his head. Equipped with a sort of laser cannon, the little man shoots multicoloured balls at Hector, which explode when they hit their targets and absorb the fumes, transforming them into dazzling light.

Carl comments:

- Self-persecution scheme: reduced to nothing! Bigotry and virtuous beliefs: dissolved! Inquisitorial identity: transmuted! For guilt, there are too many layers, it will take a few more sessions.

With an air of admiration, the angel continues:

- Thank you, Carl, the next layers will go off more easily. But for the moment, I don't think my protégé can lose any more without risking ascension, which is not expected any time soon.

Then, turning to Isabelle:

- If it makes you feel any better, the only things that have to come down are those that disable and hurt. That is a large part of what you know, but it is very encouraging. You are making exciting breakthroughs at the moment: the human sciences are making considerable progress and are increasingly taking into account more subtle aspects of the human being. Everywhere there is a better understanding of the interdependence of all things. These elements contribute to the broadening of human understanding. It is not all doom and gloom.

- And what role does this light from the higher dimensions play in this?

- Oh, it's very simple," says the angel. It's time to remember that you are part of a project...

Hector Bigot, whose face has turned pink with the effect of the coloured balls, stammers:

- A... project?

- Yes Hector. A vast project: to install and maintain total, multidimensional and unlimited consciousness within matter, in your incarnation. In your language, that simply means establishing the kingdom of God on Earth. But I prefer to avoid any religious reference, there has been enough damage already!

Suddenly straightening up, Hector exclaims:

- The return of Christ! God is coming to save us!

- Hector, you didn't hear my last sentence... the angel insists.

Confused, he returned to his shrivelled position in the chair, his soul in disarray.

- Hector, I appreciate your dedication; on the other hand, your lack of discernment has worried me for several lifetimes... You embark headlong on all sorts of galleys under the pretext that they carry the same banner: "For God". After six lifetimes of murdering infidels to please God, you have now spent five lifetimes playing the martyr to earn your salvation. I might as well say it straight away: this kind of attitude takes you away from the objectives. Heaven is a place of joy, abundance, creativity, love

and ecstasy. The fastest way to get there is to live in joy, abundance, creativity, love and ecstasy.

Without giving him time to explain, she continues:

- Instituted religions are vast shams. They were founded around the deeds of individuals who dared to live unprecedented and liberating experiences... But established religions encourage exactly the opposite: conformity, obedience to dogma, the abolition of the critical spirit, repression, impotence, sacrifice and war... All that is needed to keep paradise at bay!

She looks around the audience, then stops at Hector:

- The same goes for Christ: there's no need to look for his return on the front pages of newspapers. It's in there, she points out, hammering her words into Hector's ribcage with a finger. But we have visitors.

And the doorbell rings.

CHAPTER 5

Social divides

The concierge with a load of geraniums is followed by a man with a bald head and thick glasses.

- I took your advice. I've just come back from the botanical garden with Professor Laviolette," she said as she rushed inside, followed by the botanist. He wanted to see you right away!

The man grabs Sigmund by the sleeve and, with an accusing look accentuated by his bifocals, insults him:

- What kind of joke is this?

- Follow me to my office, we'll have a better chat, replies Sigmund, disoriented by the new turn of events and seeking support from his new friends.

They have not taken three steps when Isabelle warns them:

- Please take off your shoes before entering. It would be a shame to ruin such a beautiful lawn.

Instead of the beige woollen carpet, a beautiful expanse of grass dotted with clover and daisies covers the floor of the room. Carl is sitting on top of a daisy and waving vigorously to greet the newcomers. Hector Bigot seems to be in a state of bliss, lost in contemplation of his guardian angel. Isabelle plays with a dragonfly. As a sign of welcome, the angel rains a shower of golden particles on the caretaker, the professor and Sigmund. The particles swirl around, come together, and for a few moments form small fairy-like figures which then disappear with a tinkling laugh.

- Justin Laviolette, you are an idiot!

The voice, high up in the air, comes from the back of the room and seems to shake the professor even more than the geranium ashtrays, the

lawn, the angel, Carl and the fairy apparitions. He freezes in place, in an abyss of perplexity.

A small emerald-green being deftly emerges from a row of books on the bookcase, jumps onto the lawn and, with his index finger raised towards Lavolette, continues reproachfully:

- We played together during your childhood, we were the best friends in the world. Thanks to me you developed your passion for botany. We decided to work together to broaden scientists' understanding of nature. But you wished to forget me; you preferred to believe the nonsense that is taught at the university rather than question the sterility of knowledge.

There is no point in hiding behind your glasses: you are a coward and a dishonest person, incapable of establishing any other relationship with plants than attaching a label with a Latin name. I am deeply disappointed in you.

Carl is delighted with the scene. Sitting on the dragonfly, he draws circles in the air while dragging a banner that reads "No to genetically modified food."

Still wearing her geraniums, the concierge laughs nervously, looks around the room and understands:

- You should have told me that you make films here, like my son's videos, I would have understood better. But that's not all, I still have two more aisles to clean. Well, as long as you don't mess it up with your story! Have fun!

And, equipped with her geraniums, she returns to her dusty reality, without thinking any more about Professor Lavolette, who lies sobbing, racked with remorse and confusion, in the middle of the bed of clovers and daisies.

- Frankly speaking, I still find it hard to admit what has happened in the last twenty-four hours, sighed Sigmund, his bare feet in the soft grass. I feel like I'm living in a dream, and that I'm going to wake up any moment... I'll miss you, Carl, Isabelle, the angel, the elf, Lavolette and the others, and all the magic that permeates this dream. I'm getting a taste for it.

On hearing these words, Carl jumps from the dragonfly in mid-air, does a magnificent angelic leap and lands at Sigmund's feet. He pulls out an alarm clock from his pocket, a miniature replica of the one on the bedside table, which starts to grow and ring, louder and louder.

Carl yells to cover the sound of the bell:

- Twenty-four hours ago you were still sleeping, trapped in your dream. Now you are beginning to wake up. This awakening will stop when you realise that you are no longer dreaming - and that I won't let you sleep anymore!

- But this is madness! Persecution! Psychosis! Stop this awakening! Stop this dream!" protests Sigmund.

Serene despite the unbearable noise, the angel notes:

- Awakening is an irreversible phenomenon. Any resistance is futile and, in this case, unhealthy for the eardrums of the people in this room.

The alarm clock rings louder and louder, joined by the sudden start of the air raid sirens on the nearby roof. Then the telephone starts to ring intermittently.

With their hands pressed to their ears, Isabelle, Hector, Laviolette and the elf shouted together:

- Stop doubting! Sigmund.

Sigmund replays the film of the last few hours. He sees his clients and friends distraught by the collapse of the known, the arrival of Carl, the sequence of circumstances, his dialogues about time, the cyclone of fear into which he and Isabelle plunged, the arrival of the angel, the concierge and the botanist. He sees himself standing barefoot on the lawn of his office in the midst of an infernal din and foresees that the hours, days and years to come will be ever more unusual, unpredictable, destabilising, but also, if he allows himself, fantastic, fairy-tale and joyful. He suddenly realises that he is unable to return to previous conditions.

- Okay, okay, I get it.

Silence returns, disturbed by the leakage of air from the alarm clock's valve. While jumping on it to deflate it, Carl declares:

- Another step forward!

- It was even worse than the trumpets of Jericho!" says Hector Bigot, heartened by the fact that he is not the only one receiving lessons.

- Hector, your bondieuseries are sucking the air out of us, the angel interrupts him, before adding in a serious tone: "Look at the beam in your eye rather than the mote in your neighbour's eye.

She lets out an angelic laugh that turns into a common laughter when everyone discovers Carl, arched over Hector's nose, extracting a beam from his right eye, then another from his left.

- It's all in the eye of the beholder, said the little man, handing the pieces of wood to Bigot. It's on these planks that you used to crucify yourself. You'll have to find something else.

The bell rings at the front door. Quickly, Isabelle gets up and goes to answer it. On the landing, she discovers a small woman on high heels, her face covered in red and blue paint and surrounded by purple hair. The rest of her body is more or less naked, except for a black jumper and skirt of microscopic size that offer no obstacle to the exercise of what she sees as her vocation: human relations. In three acrobatic movements of her hips, she finds herself in the vestibule and asks:

- Are you the new secretary?

- Let's say a passing colleague..., suggests Isabelle, trying to assess the percentage of skin covered, the probable effect of this creature on Hector Bigot and the compatibility of high heels with the office lawn.

- And you are?

- Jennifer Tinsweater. I have an appointment with Dr. Afraid.

- Come in, but please take off your shoes so as not to damage our new lawn.

Perplexed, the apparition takes off her shoes, which has the effect of further reducing the surface area of skin covered. Shortened by a good ten centimetres, she enters the office and, seeing it filled with a motley crew, apologises:

- Oh, but you are in a conference! I can wait in the waiting room for a while!

- No, not at all, we've just changed the format of the sessions a little bit, says Sigmund, before adding: Pull up a chair or sit on the lawn.

By dint of contortions, Jennifer Tinysweater manages to sit on a square of clovers while keeping her skirt in place. With a nervous chuckle, she observes:

- I get it! You've started Gestalt! I've often wondered if I shouldn't do a few sessions, because sometimes I feel that people are embarrassed in my presence. There must be something unresolved back there, and...

- Jennifer is a social worker, Sigmund explains, interrupting the incessant flow of words that has been pouring into her office every week for the past four years. She spends her life helping others - a real priesthood.

- Priesthood, priesthood, that's a quick word! With all the flesh this creature is displaying, I think it has little to do with priesthood! explodes Hector, his acorn face red as a peony.

- Hector, behave yourself! interjected the angel. All it takes is for someone to relieve you of a few puritanical beliefs and you immediately become a slave to your hormones. Sometimes I think your case is incurable.

- Make way! Make way, make way! shouts Carl as he rushes in with a fire extinguisher twice his size. He rips off the safety ring and starts spraying Hector from his crotch to his face, covering him with a thick white foam.

Then, turning to Jennifer, he warns her:

- It's your turn soon!

Immediately regaining her professional reflexes, she ignores Carl's warning and rushes towards Hector with a handkerchief in her hand:

- Poor man! He's all messed up now!

- I suggest you let Hector cool off and tell us about yourself, Sigmund says. After all, this is your session, and the minutes are running out...

She stands still, forbidden, looking for clues and seeing the nods of the other people present, she sits down. She plays with a strand of her hair, contemplating its violet reflections for a few moments, then begins:

- It's not getting any better, Doctor. In fact, I have become unable to work properly. I'm being given more and more cases, with heavier and heavier social cases, with ever more miserable budgets. I'm so

overwhelmed with work that I can't think straight, when this is the very time when we should be thinking about alternatives!

- This situation is not new, you have already described it to me several times, Sigmund points out. But isn't there a new reason for your current disarray?

- No one cares, that's the reason! Tears start to fall from her eyes, drawing red and blue streaks that go down her throat, adding new shades to her moles. During the seminars, we spend our time yelling at each other about schedules, carefully avoiding talking about the real issues. My boss sits in his office all day playing Tetris, my colleagues have all joined the union to get better treatment, our clients are so high on drugs they don't know their names. And this shit is just getting started! Do you think this is something to celebrate?

Hitherto silent, the angel picks up some foam from Hector's shirt and throws it into the air. When it reaches the ceiling, the white substance begins to fizz and multitudes of coloured sparks fly out of it, forming a miniature firework display, a prelude to her comment:

- There is every reason to rejoice.

- But you don't understand!" explodes Jennifer, using her handkerchief to dry her multicoloured tears. My job has not only become useless, but harmful. I encourage defeatism, mediocrity, weakness and lies. With each of my actions, I make my clients a little more unaccountable, I put everyone in debt and society sinks further. If I keep quiet, I keep my place by becoming another whore in the system. If, on the other hand, I have the audacity to intervene, I lose my place and find myself an outcast of the system, a client of my former colleagues! The system has gone completely crazy! It makes me want to bomb it!

- I don't think that will be necessary," says Isabelle. Then, with a wink to Sigmund, she adds: "If I were you, I wouldn't close all the doors so quickly. Life is full of surprises and sometimes solutions appear where you least expect them...

Jennifer discovers that Carl has unpacked an inner tube repair kit and has been busy patching the many exposed parts of her anatomy for some time.

Without giving her time to react, Carl admonishes her:

- A real salad bowl! With so many leaks, how can you maintain your integrity? Anyone can pump you and on top of that you let anything in!

He grabs an ectoplasmic tentacle that emerges from Jennifer's navel and starts to pull until a creature emerges with a resounding "plop! Blackish, slimy, streaked with red marbling, the bug pulses spasmodically and emits an obscene energy. It tries to return to Jennifer, then to make its way towards Isabelle, but Carl blows noisily in his hands and the entity finds itself imprisoned in a translucent globe.

Delighted with the demonstration, the little man continues his diatribe:

- This is the thought-form that led you to end up in the bed of all the unfortunates. Since you were a teenager, it has paralysed your judgement by leading you to believe that charity comes through physical comfort and that recognition is acquired through the exacerbation of desire. Look how fat it is: all this time it has been feeding on desires and fantasies, your own and those you produced in others.

Then, turning to Isabelle, he adds:

- But it's in Hollywood that you find the fattest.

- Incredible! It's my obsessive need to please that's trapped in this sphere!" Exclaims Jennifer, before darkening: "But that poor creature must be suffering in there; it must be freed!

Alarmed, Carl rushes forward, bouncing on Jennifer's roughened thigh to grab another greenish-white tentacle that has just emerged at the level of her solar plexus. The latter resists further, Sigmund and Isabelle come to his aid and with a deafening "plop", an enormous entity with countless tentacles collapses on the lawn.

Without wasting a second, the angel imprisons it in a new translucent sphere, before specifying :

- I am much more suspicious of this kind: they are the ones who transmit the virus of the help syndrome.

Then she turns to Hector, who is looking at the scene with a stunned expression:

- Pay close attention, it concerns you directly! In ninety percent of cases, people catch these vicious creatures in their childhood, during Sunday school classes!

Suddenly feeling unmasked, other whitish and greenish entities desperately try to maintain control and frantically push their tentacles through every possible orifice to bind the organisms that harbour them. Hector, Sigmund, Isabelle and Justin find themselves instantly trapped in ectoplasmic fumaroles that encircle them and threaten to suffocate them.

An indescribable melee ensues in which Carl, the angel, the elf and Jennifer pull, push, tangle, untangle, struggle, run out of steam and finally calm down, while in the middle of the lawn rests an enormous translucent globe in which five tentacled ectoplasms are waving.

- One thing is certain, the sweaty angel announces, none of the people present will be tempted to start a religion again.

- It's incredible! We had these bugs inside us, exclaims Jennifer.

The square of leatherette that serves as her skirt is now torn along its entire length; but she doesn't care.

- Yes, humans are particularly appreciated hosts for these kinds of entities," says Carl.

Perched on the largest globe, he has fun dropping peanuts on the whitish creatures.

- By the way, I'd like to point out that you still have several left. I can see them waving just below the surface!

And, dropping one peanut after another to punctuate his words, he continues:

- Big oranges are very common; they perpetuate in their hosts the notion of male dominance and all the authority problems that come with it; they are found in both men and women. Waxy yellow ones make you think of relationships as a battle from which you invariably win or lose. Those with goose-poop green hues make you feel shitty: "I don't deserve to be happy". The ones that look like throat-high partitions prevent you from connecting your head and heart. The ones that look like metal urchins make you want to understand everything with your mind. And then...

- We have to get rid of them right away!" Justin Laviolette interrupts him, loudly approved by the others.

A cacophonous discussion follows, in which everyone expresses their confusion but no one listens.

The angel gestures towards the ceiling and a fine shower of copper particles begins to fall, immediately calming the assembly.

She smoothes out some of her feathers, then announces:

- I recommend that you don't eliminate all these bugs at once: you might go crazy. Some people can't stand it at all, because they've identified with these urges so much. Once they are gone, they lose all sense of existence, to the point that they will do anything to get back to similar entities.

- But I refuse to live one more second with these things inside me! protests Isabelle, banging her fist on the small translucent globe.

- So, it's up to you to take your responsibilities, replies the angel, her defiant gaze settling on Isabelle, then circling the audience. I remind you that it is you who have accepted to harbour these thought-forms and to experience the impulses they bring. Not only have you accepted that they parasitise you, but you have also nourished them, day after day. It is up to you to clean up.

- But how?" begs Hector in a quavering voice, his face now pale.

- I wouldn't recommend exorcism, Hector, it does more damage than it solves...

The silver cross that hung around Hector Bigot's neck suddenly comes off and falls to the grass. When it reaches it, it turns into smoke, leaving a scorched imprint on the green grass.

- Hihihi! says Carl, stroking the fading cross mark. A flight of ladybirds escapes.

- You are not short of resources," the angel continues. The first thing you can do is to stop feeding them... Then it's time to learn to master your intentions. You take for granted having a physical body, a house, a car, but without your intention, these things would not exist. You can also use your intention to change reality if it no longer satisfies you and, in this

case, to send your embarrassing pet bugs back to the original void from which everything came.

- But how?" intervenes Sigmund, visibly perplexed.

- The problem with humans is that they use their power, creativity and intelligence to make themselves miserable, wretched and powerless.

The angel really doesn't look happy. Small electric blue flashes zap the atmosphere around her as she explodes:

- Shit! Wake up! These bodies, mutilated by medicine and chemistry are composed of obedient atoms! All the resources of the universe are at your feet and you find nothing better to do than pollute and kill for greed. Instead of creating an enlightened reality, you invent welfare systems that institutionalise and perpetuate misery and powerlessness! There are days when I wonder if this project is still worth it.

As the angel stormed, a fine frost settled on the grass and on those present. Observing Jennifer starting to shiver, Carl remarks:

- It's fair to say that it's a bit of a shock...

More combative, Isabelle is the first to pull herself together. She takes a deep breath, concentrates for a moment, then staring at the large translucent globe, orders:

- Disappear into the void, immediately!

A violent gust of wind fills the space previously occupied by the sphere, then calm returns.

- Well, I see you've got the message,"said the angel, her joyful mood returning. I must now leave you: in the XII^e century, Hector is about to burn Ursula under the pretext that she is a witch. Have fun, Hector!

And the angel disappears in a flash of dazzling white light.

CHAPTER 6

Political fissures

Once the shock of her departure had worn off and their eyes had become accustomed to the ambient light, Sigmund, Isabelle, Laviolette, Carl and the elf discover Jennifer straddling Hector's belly, beating him and shouting:

- You bastard! I knew your face reminded me of horrors! I remember the whole story now! Bastard, bastard, bastard! This is how your sweet promises ended!

- Wait, wait, I can explain, Hector moaned, raising his arms to shield his face.

- No way! This time, you're going to pay, you old scumbag! persists Jennifer, whose outfit has finished tearing under the extent of her movements.

- Attention please! Carl, perched on the back of the Chesterfield, holds a megaphone. Before anything irreparable is done, I would like to show you something...

Both opponents freeze. Carl orders:

- Light up!

The room darkens and in the centre appears a moving three-dimensional image. For a few seconds, a caption appears announcing "Universal Pictures". Then a scene appears depicting the entrance to a cave. Hector, much hairier and wearing a beast's skin, can be seen looking for lice in Jennifer's hair, who seems to be at the height of satisfaction. The scene changes; this time Jennifer sits on a stone throne, surrounded by proud Amazons with bows, quivers and spears, while Hector lies bound and bruised at her feet. Other scenes follow, showing the couple frolicking in the moonlight, surrounded by a flock of children, praying in

a chapel or taking part in a black mass, and so on, ending with the actual image of Jennifer perched on Hector's stomach.

- Oh, my love, I'm sorry!

When the light comes back on, Jennifer and Hector are rolling on the lawn, tightly embracing. They finish their race against the bookcase at the back of the room without noticing, absorbed in their reunion.

- Here they go again, remarks Carl, in a philosophical mood. You don't cure thousands of years of illusions in one day..

Their attention is suddenly diverted from Jennifer and Hector's lovemaking by a persistent ringing of the doorbell.

Sigmund warns:

- It could be a lot of fun: it must be Francis de Pluto-Crassy.

Already in the corridor, he does not see Isabelle's mischievous smile.

The newcomer refuses to take off his shoes. Preceding Sigmund, he stands warily on the threshold of the study. He cannot see the corner of the library, but he hears Jennifer's cackling. Carl and the elf are hidden somewhere, probably to plan something bad.

Busy braiding a blade of grass between her toes, Isabelle looks up and, pretending to discover the newcomer, exclaims:

- Francis! Great protector of Arts and Culture! Our paths are definitely crossing! The opening of your latest protégé is less than a week old!

Somewhat thawed by the welcome of a familiar presence, he responds to Isabelle's greeting with a nod and enters the office, clearly disturbed by the nature of the floor. With a leap, Isabelle stands up. She continues:

- You who are so keen on conceptual art and happenings will love what's going on here!

Then, with a wave of her hand, she presents:

- Justin Laviolette, botanist and great friend of the plant kingdom.

Nodding to the bodies entangled at the foot of the bookcase:

- In the background, the priest and his friend, who are busy at the moment. Our other companions must not be far away. As for the master of ceremonies, she concludes with a bow to Sigmund, I don't need to introduce you to him.

This short speech allowed the man in the three-piece suit to regain his composure and, above all, his presence. In two strides, he reaches Laviolette, grabs his hand and shake it with the expertise born of long practice. Then he goes to the bookcase, plunges his hand into the tangled bodies, unearths a hand, then another, and shakes it, insisting:

- Admirable! Magnificent! Really very original! My congratulations!

He then sits down in the chair and, with a haughty air, asks Sigmund:

- I didn't know this event existed, dear friend! I don't remember receiving an invitation?

- No one has received any. In fact, I have significantly changed the nature of my services to match the changes currently affecting our society and my clients.

- A new form of living art," says Isabelle.

- Hm, very interesting... the other one does, inviting Sigmund to continue his explanation.

- I found that my clients and I were experiencing different - but extremely disturbed - states of mind as we came to the same conclusions: the civilisation in which we had placed all our hopes and energy is decaying; it is falling apart. We were making an inventory of what must go and what values remained on which we could build a new reality.

- Or better still, an emerging form of spirit art, interrupts Isabelle, a cynical note in her voice.

From the ceiling light, Carl's voice echoes:

- I thought you were cured of your bitterness?

- I'm sorry? Pluto-Crassy is surprised.

Laviolette provides a diversion:

- A very appropriate intervention by the genius of the lamp.

- Excellent, excellent! exclaims Francis, won over by the post-psychedelic atmosphere.

- The best thing to do, Sigmund continues, is to play the game... As a politician, how do you feel about this collapse of the system?

De Pluto-Crassy freezes in his chair and from one moment to the next his face take on a disturbing yellowish hue. Soon the yellow is replaced by

a whitish pallor with streams of cold sweat. Unable to catch his breath, he hisses wildly as his limbs twitch wildly. Wearing a fireman's outfit, Carl launches himself from the ceiling light and lands on the shoulder of Isabelle, who has just rushed to loosen the tie of the man in shock.

- 'That's what you call getting to the heart of the matter! he says to a bewildered Sigmund.

Then he takes an oxygen mask from a first aid case and applies it to Francis' mouth. He opens the cylinder valve, makes sure the gas is flowing properly, and then starts rummaging in the depths of the case. Finally, he emerges holding up three small tubes:

- 'The medicine of the future! Nothing to do with your crap barbiturates and other zombifying substances! It acts directly on the production of endorphins, where reality is created! With a good mixture of serotonin, pinalin and dymethyltriptaline, the whole level of consciousness is turned upside down, reducing the previous conditions to nothing!

He disconnects the tube from the bottle and pours the contents of the three vials into it before putting it back in place. Then he exclaims:

- 'To life!

Gradually, the colours return to the man's face. His breathing becomes more even, his body relaxes. He stares at Sigmund, Isabelle, Laviolette, then his gaze stops on Carl and the elf perched on the arm of the chair. Behind his stunned look, one can guess a feverish neuronal activity. The network of his synaptic connections is being reconfigured to produce a new representation of reality. He slowly sits up, discards the oxygen mask and, pulling the square of burgundy cloth from the top pocket of his jacket, dries the sweat accumulated on his face.

As if to test the validity of the reality into which he has just emerged, he takes a few deep breaths, before observing:

- 'What happened to me? For the first time in years, I feel like myself!

- 'You have just arrived in an undivided reality," says Sigmund. We had barely begun to discuss your perceptions of the political world when you suffered an acute asthma attack...

- 'I would call it a crisis of conscience! says Isabelle, before adding: "Oh, excuse me, these are the last remnants of bitterness..."

- Don't apologise! Francis protests. You're quite right. To tell the truth, I've felt this crisis coming on for quite some time, despite all my efforts to repress the idea. But this permanent lie was eating away at my health. And suddenly, these walls of hypocrisy broke down, like a dam bursting! I breathe again! I am living!

And, like a butterfly finishing to get rid of its chrysalis, he takes off his tie, his jacket and his waistcoat, unlaces his shoes and starts to caress the grass with his bare feet, under the tender gaze of the emerald sprite.

For a few moments he seems lost in thought, then he says:

- The hardest thing for me to admit is that for all the apparent power I have been given, I have never been anything other than a puppet operated by the financial barons. Democracy is a monumental fraud, a subtle ploy to make the people believe that they shape their destiny. It is nothing of the sort.

- But there is such a thing as the right to vote! intervenes Jennifer who, having just emerged from the trance of her reunion with Hector, finishes putting on the priestly turtleneck from which she had initially stripped him.

- What a load of rubbish! retorts Francis. First of all, the issues put to the vote are conditioned by the communication agencies; secondly, they are perverted by party slogans and finally, no matter what the outcome of the vote, the financiers control both sides of your answers and always end up doing what suits them.

In the centre of the lawn, Carl is assembling a piece of equipment consisting of a metal sphere that rests on three triangular legs and from which antennae and satellite dishes emerge. Leaning over the device, he connects the cable of a small remote control to it and fiddles with a few buttons before announcing:

- And here is your favourite series: visitors from the future!

The sphere begins to emit fluorescent glows, while a dull hum fills the room. Concentric waves of light shoot out from it and a vortex forms in the middle of the stunned audience.

The light has become almost unbearably bright as two indistinct figures appear in the centre of the vortex. Soon the vortex dissipates and the glow fades. In the centre of the group, a couple finishes materialising.

They are tall and have coppery skin that contrasts with the platinum white of their suits. Their long hair floats free, black on the man, golden brown on the woman. She leans towards Carl, invites him to climb into her hand, lifts him to the height of her face and delicately places a kiss on his cheek before observing with a laugh:

- Thanks for the lift, Carl. What's the matter with you? Did you shrink in the wash? Let me guess. It's the present day that's having that effect on you?

- Almost on target, Hera, concedes Carl, turning the other cheek. In reality, this is a strategic choice on my part. Humans of this era suffer from such an inferiority complex that I thought it more productive to appear tiny.

- I recognise your greatness!" exclaims the copper-coloured man, before crouching down on the grass. Then he looks around the assembly with a half-sovereign, half-amused look and introduces himself:

- Zeus, at your service.

Isabelle, Sigmund, Laviolette, Hector, Jennifer and Francis remain mute with surprise, unable to integrate what they consider impossible, as if on their mental screen the message had appeared: "A serious system error has occurred. Please contact your customer service.

- Should I press the reset button? asks Zeus, grabbing the remote control lying at his feet.

Electrified, Jennifer steps forward first and through the sleeve of the turtleneck, extends her freed hand to Zeus:

- Jennifer Tinysweater. Pleased to meet you!

He looks at her, lifts the bottom of her makeshift garment, puts a hand on her exposed hip and comments: 'Tinysweater? Always so contradictory, my dear Io. But I liked your previous outfits better. On the other hand, your haircut is very good! Then, turning to Hector, he adds, kneading his shoulder:

- I hope you don't mind, old chap... But she still has a real effect on me!

Isabelle steps in, looking puzzled:

- I was beginning to admit that you are from the future, but now I don't understand it.

Zeus bursts out laughing happily:

- Ah, sweet Europe! Always so divine in every incarnation! You seem to have retained your scepticism... Haven't you discovered yet that time is a relative phenomenon?

- My dear, you are confusing our friends, says Hera with an exasperated pout that barely conceals her amusement.

- You're right, I'm going astray, Zeus concedes, before adding mischievously: In a reality with no beginning and no end, where do you want to start?

- Herewith...

She settles down, cross-legged, stares at each person in turn and then says:

- I understand that you have arrived at an important stage in human history, a crucial and delicate passage. Collectively, humanity has reached the level of consciousness required to be made fully responsible for its actions, or better still, its thoughts, beliefs, emotions and the actions that flow from them.

- In other words, you are now working without a net... Zeus points out before encouraging Hera to continue.

- You think you are "witnessing" the decay of systems, but you don't seem to realise that you are the architects of this gangrene.

Francis takes the bait:

- But we are making every effort to stop this decadence!

- Above all, you spend considerable energy delaying the inexorable," she observes. It's as if, in love with a summer, you're trying to freeze the round of the seasons. That's not really a responsible attitude. Like a summer rich in memories, the human story as you see it is coming to an end. It has allowed you to grow through a multitude of experiences, sometimes happy, sometimes painful. But the tide is washing away the

sandcastles you have built on the beach. Other adventures await you; your next castles will be built with thought!

She pauses for a moment to observe a beetle standing on a blade of grass, waving its antennae in greeting, then returns to her explanation:

- You see only the agony around you, while you have never been so alive and close to awakening. You lament the lack of meaning, the chaos, the depravity, the violence, you lament the popular resignation, but you don't seem to understand that all these conditions originate in your consciousness. The way you look at the world is the mould in which your reality is formed.

Perched on Hera's shoulder, Carl claps so vigorously that he loses his balance and slips on the platinum suit.

He clutches at a strand of golden hair and ends up on the bouncing shape of her breast, before adding with a sigh:

- I like the mould in which you form your reality!

- Thank you, Carl.

She continues:

- It is up to each of you to imagine a new reality and to draw from within yourselves the resources and the boldness to bring it into existence.

- And now we can give you a little help... announces Zeus, his eyes filled with lightning.

- A helping hand?

- Oh, nothing to do with a divine intervention, don't worry... Hera jokes. We simply plan to make you discover another perspective, if you have the will... and the courage!

- I don't think we have much left to lose!

For a moment, their eyes meet, then Sigmund exclaims:

- Above all, we have something to gain!

The atmosphere begins to vibrate, while the objects and bodies in the room gain in luminous intensity. Soon the décor becomes translucent and the walls no longer block the view.

- Be careful with your thoughts! warns Zeus. In the future, being yourself is going to be crucial. You will not be able to continue playing mortal for much longer.

- Playing mortals? repeats Isabelle, taken aback.

- Look around you, suggests the woman in the platinum suit, wrapping an arm around her. You have nothing left to rest your feet on, except your own intention. As for the cemetery where you planned to end your days, I can't see a trace of it anymore...

During this exchange, the office, the house, the city and the planet become completely translucent. All around, they see the midnight blue of starry space, the great shimmering trail of the Milky Way, and further away, multicoloured galactic clusters.

Hugging Isabelle more insistently, Hera continues:

- Admire your splendour and that of your companions!

Floating in the void of space, Isabelle and her friends shine like a thousand suns. From their silhouettes, surrounded by a series of iridescent halos of light, thousands of rays of light shoot out into infinity.

- Divine sight, isn't it? comments Carl, his eye fixed behind the viewfinder of a video camera.

- Wonderful! says Isabelle in a breath. But what are all these rays coming from me? It's as if I'm the crossroads for them. Besides, they leave a familiar impression on me...

Hera touches a beam:

- Who are you?

A flood of images, smells and feelings instantly imbue Isabelle with all the memories of ancient Greece. As vivid as those of the last hours she has just lived, they contain all the experience and memory of an existence. But already, Hera's fingers slip and caress other beams. Victorian England, Pharaonic Egypt, the Tibetan highlands, Celtic Gaul, Sumerian rites on the banks of the Euphrates, the great plains of America with their bison, all these memories are unfolding.

Like a harpist playing her instrument, Hera stretches her arm out to reach more distant rays and in a reassuring voice announces:

- A less usual repertoire, now...

Images and impressions resume their round, untranslatable and yet so intimate. Gaseous presences performing a ballet around a double star with purplish colours, ecstatic explosions of gigantic vegetable creatures disseminating their seeds, a fantastic palace surveyed by creatures with reptilian aspects, the pure jubilation of a crew of bluish entities with humanoid forms which, at the controls of a crystal vessel, cross the furnace of a nova.

- Who are you, my sweet friend? concluded Hera, her hand now caressing Isabelle's face.

Then, turning to the others, she notes with a laugh:

- From the look on your face and the tornado that shakes your aura, you also seem to have enjoyed the trip...

- But how is it that we experienced the same thing?

- You have experienced common events from different points of view. I have simply chosen scenes from which you have shared the substance. Let's call it a holographic induction.

Zeus adds:

- After that, don't come and tell us that you lack experience!

He pauses before continuing:

- A whole swathe of reality is preparing to move into a higher octave in the scale of dimensions. From the subatomic to the spirit level, the vibrational frequency is increasing, altering the very texture of reality, the space-time continuum. This is why time plays tricks on you.

In the dimension you are familiar with, the effects of your intentions, thoughts and emotions were diluted, spread out over time. But in the dimension you are about to enter, everything manifests instantly. The moment you think, fear or hope for something, you experience it. That's what I meant by working without a net: experiencing your psychic dispositions immediately and completely, and therefore preferably gaining control of them...

After reflection, he adds:

- The move has already begun: you are living simultaneously in two systems of reality with different laws. Are you beginning to understand why the old systems no longer work?

- What about the world we know? Our history, our culture, our achievements... What will become of it all?

- It will pass, as previous civilisations have passed... Zeus replies with a smile. I hope you will keep only the best of it.

- It will pass! Billions of human beings, countless animal and plant species, an incredibly rich planet! We cannot let this die by hiding behind philosophical screens!

With a wide gesture of her arm, Hera indicates the luminous and living infinity that surrounds them:

- Look around you, Francis, and tell me where death is. We are not philosophising, but performing an alchemical work of cosmic proportions. Love made you leap to protect this planet and the life on it. Without love, all that exists is meaningless. Without love, the alchemical work is not possible. Without love, there is no hope of fulfilment.

She pauses briefly to let her words sink in, before turning to the group:

- Your perceptions trap you. By dint of having been force-fed beliefs that reduce your being to a skin envelope, you have produced a neurotic civilisation whose major preoccupation consists of trying to escape, ward off or delay death, without much success.

- You don't make such a fuss when you change cars!

She gives him a disapproving look before continuing:

- Trapped in this vicious circle, your love manifests itself in the multitude of actions taken to relieve suffering and restore dignity to your fellow human beings. These are noble, courageous and inspired acts. But as long as you remain loyal to the beliefs that underlie this suffering, they will continue to cloud your daily life.

- I understand, says Sigmund. To relieve suffering is one thing, but to make it go away is another. And I am well placed to know how subjective it can be, linked to one's attachments...

- Precisely! Where to start? asks Hector, who does not feel ready to start another monastic life.

Hera bursts out laughing:

- I suggest that you stop feeding all the beliefs and stereotypes that are swarming the collective consciousness. And while you're at it, quickly get rid of all those entities and other thought-forms that parasitise your energy fields. Once these major cleansings have been carried out, nature will take over again. You will no longer have so many qualms about leaving behind the civilisation you have built around your concepts of separation.

Jennifer expresses the common thought:

- Could we get a glimpse of what's to come?

- The future will take the shape you give it. But in broad terms, humanity has about fifteen centuries to become familiar with its emerging capabilities.

- What skills?" asks Jennifer.

- For example, the human species could rapidly become telepathic; you would then see the birth of a society without secrets, in which the suffering or joy of one being is felt by all the others. This would be a major evolutionary leap: social peace would be guaranteed by the inalienable right of each person to be happy, free to explore and work towards the fulfilment of their own values...

- What about the other planets, the stars? Will we meet other intelligences?

- Maybe, laughs Zeus, if you use something other than a microscope...

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