



NATURAL
CHRONOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

My research work starts with the question of the relationship between man and nature. It encompasses two opposed behaviours : domination and admiration. Man cuts down whole forests, kills a great many species to get only what he wants, and meanwhile, he buys a pot of flower for his own living-room. Man destroys all resources on Earth, however he can't imagine living without nature. Parks, gardens and trees are essential in cities : there is no city without a piece of nature. But we live with it only if it is mastered : this nature is controlled by man. Nature seems to be both precious and threatening, we both destroy and protect it as if there were two different kinds of nature. But we currently hear about environmental emergency : we know what it concerns, we buy recyclable packaging to think that we are not so bad towards nature, but we don't feel really committed. Maybe that's because man thinks that he lives outside of nature, like another entity, like if he lives in a parallel world. Man thinks that the world of man and the world of nature are separate, but he forgets that he is part of nature. Man belongs to nature : first through his body, secondly through some instinctive feelings. This nature has essential limits, in order to preserve a fundamental balance : cycle. This implies that each thing has to die one day: there is life when there is death. It is necessary to respect this balance, to be able to live on Earth. So, to live in a realistic way, isn't it important to become aware of our naturalness ? What could make us respect it ? To answer those questions, our research must deal first with the relationship between man and plants precisely, then between man and nature. We will see then why man belongs to nature, and how he tries to escape from it. But living without limits isn't possible in a finite place like our planet, because everything has an end and that's how it works : therefore, if man doesn't have limits, he won't be able to live sustainably and will

finally destroy nature for good. Consequently, accepting death is a fundamental step for mankind, to keep on living and protecting a cyclical balance.



I

PLACE AND ROLE OF PLANTS AT HOME

My work begins with a first question : how do we introduce green plants at home and why ? How useful are they ? What are their functions ? We will see that this first question will lead us to a more important point : the relation we have with nature and with our own naturality.

THE USEFUL PLANT

First of all, our main link with nature is with useful plants. They are vegetables, plants that we eat, nature that we use. It's our first contact with it. Man uses nature for his own good, to survive and also to master it. It's one of the defects of man to want to dominate everything, instead of letting things happen without being able to control them. We can notice here that man has a relation with nature based on violence and domination : it has led mankind to the current emergency about the environment, because we have kept on consuming all resources and now, there is almost nothing left.

If we focus on useful plants, we talk about vegetables : this is how nature allows us to live. Those vegetables are not all growing at the same time of the year. Each one grows at a special time : but in our society, where we can purchase everything whenever we want, we have forgotten that there is a special cycle in nature. Therefore, we can notice that man lives on a different scale than nature.

THE DECORATIVE FUNCTION OF PLANTS

This difference is obvious in our relation with green plants at home. Green plants have an essential function : they are decorative. They embody our relation to time, that is to say that green plants express the flow of time, evolution and death. We are close to green plants, because they make a place breathe. Having a green plant at home makes it welcoming and cheerful, it makes it alive. Instead of showing the cycle of nature like green plants do, a flower gift expresses our idea of time, eternal youth. When we offer flowers to someone, we offer the flower in full bloom, so we offer the idea of eternal beauty because we hope they will last as long as possible. This fantasy is purely human and cultural, it extracts us from nature because we are not living with the same idea of time anymore.

II

MAN AND NATURE

However, before talking about this different rhythm that puts us outside of the natural world, we must move forward with our research, toward the concept of nature. We can define it through the relationship between man and nature.

WHAT NATURE ?

The concept of nature is complicated. First, it refers to all the elements which compose the physical universe, and all of the things which compose our environment. Those elements are alive like plants and animals, or not alive (but not dead either) such as minerals, water, fire, or wind. In the common sense, nature generally means all things which are not human or derived from human action. The word nature is, consequently, opposed to culture.

When we think about nature, we also think about an imaginary nature, with mystery and maybe magics. The movie *Princess Mononoke* by Hayao Miyazaki, completed in 2000, shows this kind of nature : a mysterious world in the forest, with unknown creatures and magical phenomenons. Such nature is regarded as sacred. But should we regard as sacred something that doesn't exist anymore ? If we consider nature as something untouched by man, it doesn't exist anymore because everything has been modified by man. Nature and man live together, so interactions are unavoidable. Nothing is as pure and « virgin » as we would like to imagine it.



WILD NATURE AND MASTERED NATURE

This sacred nature concerns wildness. Wild nature is frightening, powerful. It's something we don't know very well, it's like another world ; that's why we have all these documentaries on television, all these photographs about a wild world far away from ours. Mastering culture is a way to own and to control a piece of nature. It implies the miniaturization of nature, for instance with gardens, which are samples. The aquarium *Floating garden* created by the French designer Benjamin Graindorge miniaturizes the interactions between water and soil : there is an ordinary aquarium with some fishes, and above a little garden where some plants are growing. We don't know this system very well ; we know that some interactions exist between all elements but we don't know how. This aquarium is also a sample of what happens naturally, so that we can be close to its functioning and we can understand it because it is now on a human scale. Otherwise, we can notice that man tries to control everything. The relationship between man and nature is composed of two different approaches : contemplation and possession.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE, COMPOSED WITH VIOLENCE AND CONTEMPLATION

The contemplative behaviour is a poetic approach to nature : it means understanding it through poems, contemplation, art. We can take for example the project of Hubert Duprat, who uses larva. Those larvae make their cocoons with things they find : Hubert Duprat left them in a sort a bowl with many shiny and fancy pieces, so that when the larvae were making their cocoons they were making them with the golden pieces. At the end, larvae made beautiful cocoons, and Hubert Duprat gave us another perception of insects, than the negative perception we generally have, which is to think that they are dirty,

ugly and disgusting. Unfortunately, this contemplative behaviour exists only in art and literature, because our western culture has led us to think we are superior to nature. On the other hand, there is the possessive behaviour. It's a part of our culture that leads man to extract himself from nature. Man uses nature with violence to serve his own purposes. By using it with brutality, man extracts himself from it because he considers himself as dominant, so he is outside. By considering ourselves outside nature, we are not living at the same pace, that is to say : nature has its own cycle, it's circular, composed of life and death, whereas man's time is linear.



III

WHY MUST WE CONNECT OURSELVES TO NATURE ?

THE TWIN PACE OF CIVILISATION

This linear time is imposed by our occidental society. It means that we don't see human life as a part of the cycle of nature, but as a period with a beginning and an end. We constantly live in intensity, there is supposedly a perfect age, and once we are older than this age, we are useless and uninteresting. We are also afraid of death, and that's why we would like to be young forever. In our culture, death is a definitive end, with only a grave to represent us to the living world. We think that youth is the best time of our life, but that's because of the image of old age and death given by society.

But in spite of this linear time, man belongs to nature because his body is like other living beings' bodies : it is born, it grows up and it dies. So, in spite of his culture, man is still connected to nature by his chronobiology. Chronobiology means that we have in ourselves a rhythm that allows us to live at day time, and our metabolism or our cardiac rhythm is made for working differently in the day and at night. We don't have the same needs and the same capacities twenty four hours a day ; it depends on the moment. Therefore, our body is programmed for different moments of the day.

WHEN SCIENCE GOES OVER NATURAL LIMITS : WHAT ARE THE RISKS ?

However, society tells us that youth is the best age. We are told what is beautiful, what is worth, that we have to avoid getting old. Man and science try to push forward our own limits, like our strength, our capacities, and the end of our life, that is to say, from an extreme point of view, the current transhumanism tries to make human beings almost immortal. Even if it fails, science tries to postpone the time of our death, because man is just afraid of death and of not leaving any trace after him. But what are the risks ? Transhumanist pretend that man has to try to increase his capacities, as if it was some ethic obligation. The movie *Gattaca* realised by Andrew Niccol in 1997 shows us a world dominated by bio-technology. Everybody has been transformed even before being born, because parents are able to choose their child's DNA. In such a world where each individual is perfect, where each has the best level of his capacities, the hero is an ordinary man different from all the others. With his faults and also his qualities, he tries to live in this modified society and to achieve his dream. This movie is scary because all the disparities that exist nowadays are extended in this world : those who are not modified are considered as losers, so there is an important discrimination created by science. Transhumanism is a dangerous science because, like for all discoveries, there are good and bad intentions. It could lead us to erase our human limits. But can we live without limits in a finite place ?

The idea is not to preserve nature, as something which is sacred, but to become aware that we are a part of a cycle and that we need to respect it. We could respect it by accepting our own naturality.

IV

THE SYMBOLIC ORNAMENT TO EXPRESS OUR NATURALITY

FUNCTIONS OF SYMBOL

The question is : what could make us respect it ? Our naturality is an important concept but it is also something hard to understand, like a lot of other notions : death or love for instance. Man needs to represent those notions on a human scale : that's why he creates symbols, which are the physical representations of abstract ideas. They are artefacts, which means that they have been created by man. It's important for man to use an artefact to represent something that he doesn't understand immediately, because he can express it by his own means. Therefore, symbols could be used to represent our naturality. It's a tool used since the beginning of humanity, to represent some fundamental notions to man. It started in Prehistoric times, when prehistoric man used it to represent death, which is a part of life. A symbol gives shape to a wide concept, it helps us to understand something inside us or a notion of life. For example, the red rose represents the power of love, because a flower is ephemeral and the red color reminds us of blood and passion. It puts in a human scale a fundamental idea that man can't understand immediatly. The idea of naturality is a wide concept that needs to be expressed by an artefact. Ornaments are symbolic objects that appeared at the same time as symbol : they represent social statute, wealth and belief of the wearer. It has an intimate link to man's body, which is the witness of our natural features : therefore, ornament is a symbolic object able to embody our own naturality.

JEWEL, SYMBOL OF AN EXISTENTIAL ISSUE

To symbolise naturality, the object needs to have a special link with our body, because we live our natural features through it. A jewel is a symbolic object that has existed since Prehistoric times : men decorated dead men with jewels which represented life after death, to help him in this eternal journey. Jewels have existed in every civilisation, because they have always had many functions : they express social or conjugal status, represent wealth, religion and belief, they signify affiliations to a social group. Even if a jewel is seen as a superficial object now in our society, it has always been an object which embodies people's features and personalities. The necklace *Mit 81 Fingerabdrücken (With 81 fingerprints)* by Gerd Rothmann was made with 81 fingerprints molded in gold pieces. The user wears the prints of 81 people, who may be close to him, maybe they are his family, or maybe they are just some people who had been once a part of his life. This necklace keeps the prints of each : it embodies the link between human beings. A jewel can be a way to express what is fundamental to us, because it's symbolic and it also relates to the body's life : consequently, it is the best way to represent our own naturality, because it's a product close to us, which expresses that we belong to nature through our body.



CONCLUSION

Western man evolved separately from nature. In a constant opposition to the environment, mankind created its own laws, its own rules, different from those of nature. Man doesn't consider himself as a part of nature's, but as a part of his own human world. Nature is seen much more as a useful resource which must be preserved than as an ecosystem which is composed of all elements on Earth, including man. By living outside of it, in a human world, man forgets that he belongs to nature too : besides, his body testifies to his naturalness. Before everything, man is a living being like all other animals ; a man is born, grows up and dies like all natural things. But, even if nature has a cycle and so does a man's body a man lives at a different pace, a cultural pace. This pace, created by occidental societies, advocates youth and denies death, which is frightening. The body is hurt by this will to remain young : man doesn't want to grow old, and tries to keep his body young to seem young too. We saw with transhumanism that man looks for immortality and tries to erase definitely death. But if man doesn't die anymore, the balance is broken : we can't live forever in a finite place. Man needs to become aware of his naturalness and its importance, and he also needs to understand it. To get aware of this kind of abstract notion, a notion that goes beyond what man can see and can touch, man creates objects or signs which represent an abstract idea : these are symbols. A symbol has the power to embody a notion and to express its main meaning, so that man can get and accept its concept. To understand naturalness, man needs to represent it through a symbolic object which has a link with his body, seeing as the witness of natural features. This object is a finery : a jewel is the symbol of many notions and expresses a lot of things, so it also could express our naturalness. But it must appear during an existential step, such as the birth, the death of a close family member, or a step that unifies men between them, like an organ or blood donation.

This gift of a piece of one's body is like giving a piece of ourselves to someone we don't know at all : we give a part of us. This choice of giving an organ is the absolute gift, and it needs to be represented by something which embodies the cycle of life and naturalness. A jewel could appear at this moment, to guide the protagonists during this important choice. This jewel must not be conspicuous but discreet, because it would represent the intimate choice of the wearer. It would also combine opposite but compatible elements, like the fundamental idea of Yin and Yang, to express that there is no real life without death, and that we are all dependant of each other. Those opposite elements could be for instance a bone joined to a flower, because the first one represents death whereas the second one represents life. The materials employed have to be poor, like wood, bone or seed, because they are commons, therefore as universals as man's body. In organ donation, the one who gives or his family, and the one who receives are going through a major step of their lives : there is no difference of cultures, of religions, of way-of-life. It's a moment when we become aware that we are all the same, we are all made of the same organs, the same skin, the same body, and that we all have blood running through our veins, no matter who we are.

SUMMARY

Since the beginning of humanity, man evolves outside of nature. He has never considered himself as a part of nature and even now he forgets that he belongs to a natural balance which makes rules the world. But should he keep on seeing himself as apart from natural world ? Isn't it unrealistic to deny his own naturality ?

Nature implies cyclical time, which is composed of life and death. This cycle is essential to keep balance. But the western man built his own view of time, a linear time : he would like to live young for ever and he refuses the end. However, our body is the witness of our naturality : it lives at the same pace than nature because it grows old and dies. Denying our death brings us to dangerous fantasies like the transhumanism, which considers death as a simple defect we could totally erase. But it is not sustainable to live without limits in a finite place ; so, it is necessary to understand and to accept that we belong to nature and we must live on the same rhythm. Since Prehistoric times, man uses symbol as a tool to understand those wide concepts. Because this notion of naturality deals with our body, the symbol used has to be physically close to us : so, jewels are symbolic objects that could express our own natural. They could appear during an important step of life, when it is fundamental to understand that life doesn't exist without death.