

**About Ivan Illich:
(Preparatory Notes for a Seminar)**

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Most readers of Illich will admit that there are big differences between his early and later works. However, to speak of a “young Illich” and a “late Illich” might be too reminiscent of an example that has given rise to endless speculation: the “young Marx” and the “late Marx.” The turning point (*die Kehre*) is not of the same nature in the two cases. Speaking of Illich, we must consider his intuition that around 1980 a “landslide” (his term), a single epistemic rupture affected Western or modern culture as a whole in a way that radically altered the conceptual and perceptual milieu within which Illich, in the 1970s, formulated his critique of the institutions of industrial society. This means that, if we are to be true to his ideas, we will have to revisit his early critical work in light of his later ones and his ‘self-criticism.’¹ According to his last interview with David Cayley,² industrial society was the last phase of a historical epoch spanning eight or nine centuries which Illich called the technological or instrumental age or the era of tools.

It is not without some trepidation that I launch this suggestion of ‘re-reading’ the first works of a highly public author in the light of his latest works, for the landscape over which Illich flies is so vast that such a proposal could too easily lead to a dialogue of the deaf between

¹ An autocritique that, in my opinion, was often a didactic device used as a pointer to something more profound: his intuition that his early work was written in and for an epistemic frame that is no more.

² *The Rivers North of the Future. The Testament of Ivan Illich as Told to David Cayley*, Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2005.

specialists locked in mutually tight disciplines and languages. For their part, certain professional historians have already expressed reservations about the “right” that Illich would arrogate to himself to embrace long-term movements over a period of nearly a millennium, or even more in the case of his study of proportionality.

However, we did not meet to discuss *a priori* the formal merits of the most daring intuitions of the “late Illich,” but much more to ask ourselves the question that every serious author deserves: “what did he mean? that man? And, to the extent possible, to respond to them on their own terms. This man meant that a unique cultural spime—a space-time, an era or an age in which certain perceptions and conceptions of the here and now, of place and space, of duration and of time, of the flesh and of the body, of the body and of the world, of the interior and of the exterior, of the individual and of the social body, of the near and the far and of the border between them, of the generation of things beyond this frontier by a matrix located beyond and forms of causality—began in the twelfth century and ended in the last decades of the twentieth century. In our meeting, it will therefore be necessary to tolerate confrontation between the 12th and the 20th and 21st centuries, that is to say, we will have to allow the confrontation of a phenomenology of the end of the era of tools and a cultural history of its beginnings.

Illich later convinced himself that what separates us from the time during which he wrote, what he will call in retrospect his pamphlets on compulsory schooling, transport or medicine,³ is a real tectonic flaw, a rupture marking the end of a space-time of nine centuries. The only way, it seems to me, to evaluate a historiographical hypothesis of this magnitude is to judge it by its fruits, the strength of its intuitions, the avenues that it eventually opens. Despite their seemingly

³ *Deschooling Society*, 1971; *Energy and Equity*, 1974 ; *Medical Nemesis*, 1976.

unreasonable scope, some of these leads have been very fruitful for many of his friends and colleagues, and I hope some of them can tell us firsthand how they were.

What I am proposing here is at first glance a sort of “backward journey” of Illich’s work which, starting from his last lines of research and writings, would lead us regressively to his radical criticism and, in my opinion, revolutionary criticism of industrial society as it could be analyzed thirty-five or forty years ago. This presentation in the opposite direction—at least in part, or rather, as suggested in a different context by his friend, the historian Ludolf Kuchenbuch—this progressive-regressive approach in the manner of a crab seems to me quite appropriate in France, a country where Illich’s early works have been widely received and discussed while his later essays are virtually ignored.⁴ An additional difficulty is that Ivan, in his later years, liked to express his ideas in conversations, in letters to friends, even in generous contributions to their research rather than in clean books. In this regard, a good dozen witnesses are still alive and could contribute to our meeting, but the majority of them do not speak French.

The Loss of the Senses,⁵ The Topicality of Illich’s Thought

I will first try to show why, in my opinion, the two themes of Illich’s part of the senses and topicality are intimately linked. In very general terms, let us say that Illich saw, in what was in turn defined as the march towards modernity (Polanyi, Dumont) and the Westernization of the world (Illich, *Le genre vernaculaire*, N 5), a process of disembodiment, that is to say a

⁴ See the “would be complete”--and still incomplete--bibliography of his works established by his German friends: Ivan Illich, *Bibliographische Sammlung*, Bremen, April 29 2005. CIDOC, the center from which he published his “pamphlets” on industrial society closed in 1976. The works corresponding to the years 1950 to 1976 occupy less than seven pages, while the works written between 1977 and 2002 occupy more than thirty pages. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that one fifth of Illich’s work has been written “from the other side” of the epistemic break while four fifths of it has been thought and written “from this side” of the rupture, that is after what he considered the end of the technological epoch.

⁵ Ivan Illich, *La Perte des sens*, Paris : Fayard, 2004.

progressive loss of the sense of the flesh. The fundamental paradox which, relatively early in his life, the theologian Illich stumbled upon, is that this numbness of the carnal senses manifested itself precisely within the culture born out of faith in the Incarnation of the Word, of Western culture. But as soon as he faced this paradox as a theologian and believer, Illich reformulated it in terms of historical immanences, leaving uncapitalized both incarnation and verb.

Since the 12th century, particularly in France, it has been possible to observe and follow step by step a slow dissociation of verb and flesh (lowercase twice). The first steps on this path correspond perhaps to the gradual mastery of silent reading and the concomitant repression of any gesticulatory accompaniment of reading (Jousse⁶). The following steps expunge the context of text, they record the gradual detachment of the text from the page,⁷ a movement of which the hypertext on the remote range of the computer is the contemporary avatar. A parallel line of research is the growing separation of the tool from the hand (see the concept of *instrumentum separatum* proposed by historian Ludolf Kuchenbuch) and consequently the increasing distance or distality between the body and the instruments of his studied techniques by anthropologists like Leroi Gourhan⁸ or historians like Norbert Elias.⁹

Seeking to establish a non-theological conceptual frame of reference in which the slow separation and increasing distance between flesh and verb, tool and hand can be discussed, Illich proposed to analyze it as a progressive loss of the sense of proportionality. Proportionality is by no means a specifically Christian concept. It may even be a general cultural trait from which

⁶ Marcel Jousse, *L'Anthropologie du geste*, Paris : Gallimard, 1974, *La Manducation de la parole*, Paris : Gallimard, 1975.

⁷ Ivan Illich, *The Vineyard of the Text*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

⁸ Andre Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, MIT Press, 1993.

⁹ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, Blackwell Publishing, 1994.

only modernity would have departed. Ancient Greece conceptualized it as the foundation of music, and the Middle Ages inherited this conception.¹⁰

Under names such as *convenientia*, *ratio* or *proportio*, the Schoolmen saw it as proper to the Incarnation of the Word but, from the XIIth century on, Illich claims, they progressively betrayed it by adopting *instrumentality* as the rational foundation of theology (see sacramental theology), philosophy and cosmology. One of the meeting's panels should examine why the concept of *instrumentality* is potentially – or has been - contrary to proportionality.

In the second half of the XIIth century, a fascination for instrumentality or *causa instrumentalis* (Illich) manifested itself. A little like the *system* today, the *instrument* became an all-compassing and all-explicative metaphor progressively extending its shadow upon what, not being instrumental, had been gratuitous. One century later, it led to what Jean Gimpel has called “the industrial revolution of the Middle Ages”¹¹ and with it, to the *instrumental* or *technological era* that, according to Illich, lasted until the end of the XXth century. At the same time, the understanding of being, the perception of *what is*, and of symbols expressing it, began to progressively change: symbols ceased to be in *ontological consonance* or “participation”¹² with being and tended to become a class for itself, *conventionally associated* with classes of existents and concepts (Saussure). Perception and its understanding were radically transformed. To sum it up in few words: before the XVIIth century, perception was, as Bachelard would say, “a mutual seizure of the body and of the world” or an adequacy, a fitness, a mutual *convenientia*, *ratio* or

¹⁰ Matthias Rieger, *Helmholtz Musicus. Eine Studie über Helmholtz' Objektivierung der Grundlagen der Musik, dargestellt anhand einer Textanalyse der Tonemfindungen* (1877), doctoral dissertation, Brême, 2001.

¹¹ *La Révolution industrielle du Moyen Âge*, Paris : Seuil, 1975.

¹² Ladner, Gerhart, “Medieval and Modern Understanding of Symbolism: a Comparison,” en *Speculum, A Journal of Medieval Studies*, Vol LIV, abril 1979, no 2, pp. 223-256. What distinguishes medieval, always proportional symbology from modern “symbolic codes” is the proportionality between the symbols and the objects they stand for in the first and its absence in the conventions of the latter.

proportio between the sense organs and the reality wanting to be perceived (Rieger). There are here many resonances between Illich and the Foucault of *The Order of Things*.¹³ Both coincide that the history of western mentalities or of the western *epistemè* suffered a radical breach or rupture (an *epistemic rupture* according to Foucault, a landslide according to Illich) at the end of the XVIIth century (Illich) or of the XVIIIth century (Foucault).

For Illich-the-theologian, the prototype of proportionality is the mutual *convenientia* (Aquinas's expression) between the *Verb* and the *Flesh* in the *Incarnatio Verbi*, basic and formative belief of the West. Yet, this proportionality is mirrored in the relationship between anyone's *word* and *flesh* and from now on, Illich contended, the history of their proportionality and of its demise can be studied in historical terms independent of the historian's beliefs or disbeliefs.

Summarizing Illich's historical *theôriâ* (vision, spectacle): two ruptures or "landslides" radically differentiate a "before" from an "after" in the culture of the modern West (taking "modern" in the broad sense): the end of *proportionality* at the time of the invention of the well-tempered scale in music, at the end of the XVIIth century, and the demise of *instrumentality* at the end of the XXth century. It is still not clear how both ruptures relate nor what differentiates the place of *proportionality* in early western thought from the place and the effects of *instrumentality*. My reading of the XIIth century abbot Sugerius suggests that instrumentality first appeared as a rationalization of adequacy, appropriateness, fitness, *convenientia* (viz the ambiguity of the word "means," which has both a proportional and an instrumental meaning).

¹³ *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, A translation of *Les Mots et les choses*, New: York, Vintage Books (Random House), 1994.

To gain time, I allow myself to stage imaginary debates in which I will enlist several of you. In the first of my “experiments in thought,” Professor Ludolf Kuchenbuch would lead a panel on *Illich and history*. Paul Veyne’s essay on Foucault could be a starting point: Again, there are points of contact, but also great divergences between Illich’s and Foucault’s concept of a historian’s chores¹⁴. To summarize Illich’s attitude toward history in only two points, I dare to say that:

1. Illich considers that the past is a much richer source of surprise and *estrangement*¹⁵ than any futurology or science fiction, which are at best projections of present-day certainties and illusions into a non-existent space-time, the *future*.
2. The estrangement gained from the confrontation with the radical “otherness” of the past ought to be cultivated by the serious historian. Yet, if, after painful efforts, he can obtain a certain familiarity with a past epoch’s mentality and perceptual milieu, this estrangement, changing direction, can affect his vision of *his* epoch, modernity, our present, and reveal its truth in an unfamiliar, unsuspected light.

In his German works and conversations, Illich called *Zeitgeschichte* (“time history”) the form of history-writing inspired by a cultivated estranged glance at the present “in the mirror of the past.”¹⁶ It is the antonym of *development history*, the painting of vast historic panoramas elaborated, not unlike “peplum-movies,” out of selected remnants and debris of the past filtered by modern prejudices and “certainties.” Development history is always *retrodictive*¹⁷: it searches

¹⁴ Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l’histoire, suivi de Foucault révolutionne l’histoire*, Paris : Seuil, 1978.

¹⁵ See David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1985.

¹⁶ Ivan Illich, *In the Mirror of the Past. Lectures and Addresses 1978-1990*, New York – London, Marion Boyars Publishers, 1992.

¹⁷ See Alain Caillé, “L’emprise du marché,” in Maurice Aymard, ed., *Lire Braudel*, Paris, 1988, p. 107, quoted by Jean Robert, *Raum und Geschichte. Kurseinheit 1*, Hagen, Fernuniversität, 1998, p. 54.

the past for the “origins” of specifically modern situations and reconstructs impressive sceneries out of fragments disembedded from their historical specificities, like for instance “the origins of capitalism in the grain trade between North-Italian cities in the XIVth century.” By contrast, *Zeitgeschichte* does not attempt to *visualize* the past in impressive images but rather explores the emergence of improbable or aberrant situations (see the reference to George Steiner in Illich’s book *In the Vineyard of the Past*) and of “objets biscornus” (Veyne) among a dense fabric in which they first seem to have no place. Whereas *development history* pretends to co-opt emergent situations as “the origins” of “what we have,” *Zeitgeschichte* attempts to show what this cooptation conceals and obscures. It is what Ludolf Kuchenbuch and Thomas Sokol are pointing at, when they write, in reference to the emergence of (wage-) *labor* as a concept and a social fact: “It is not possible to write the history of labor, since labor, as a well-defined object susceptible of being followed, similar to itself, through the ages, simply does not exist.”¹⁸ Yet it is partly possible, but difficult, to unravel past forms of productive work, of subsistence knowledge, abilities and skills that were uprooted along the road to modern wage labor: what can be followed is the cultural clearing that constituted—not unlike a *chôra*¹⁹—a “space,” an epochal frame, a “time” in which this object with an ever-changing content could progressively take a dominant position. To take another example often mentioned by Illich: Aristotle’s “discovery” of the “law of offer and demand” and hence scarcity among the ‘sausage’ vendors (*kapeloi*) on Athen’s marketplace or *agora* and his judgment that this deviant behavior would never

¹⁸ Ludolf Kuchenbuch et Thomas Sokol, *Grundkurs Ältere Geschichte. Arbeit im vorindustriellen Europa, Kurseinheit 1*, Fernuniversität, Hagen, 1989, p. 4.

¹⁹ In my opinion, the activity of the *development historian* more than poetically evokes the grubbing acts of the *chôritès* (“peasant”) that uproots a piece of nature in order to open a *chôra* (field, “empty space” for Plato) where to edify a new order. The verb *oikodomeo* expressed this destruction preparing a construction or a culture. Since this act was the founding act *par excellence*, the development historian is a founder in the sense that, not unlike Cain, he murders his neighbor by erasing his memory. *Development history* is always an act of power implying violence to the dead. *Zeitgeschichte* is the history of the renouncement to power, of *ahimsa* and of due respect to the dead.

generalize itself because it was countered by an institution in which scarcity had no place, *oikonomia* or the administration of one's own house. From there, *development history* postulates an illusory line of continuity between Aristotle's "discovery," late medieval *Hausväterökonomik*, Montchrestien, Mandeville, Marx, Walras, Keynes, von Hayek up to mathematized speculations based on "Peter's and Mary's" tricks in the newest applications of game theory to economics.

Zeitgeschichte rather attempts, which is more difficult, to recover the perceptions, concepts and words associated with suppressed realities hardly imaginable by the modern mind-frame. It stresses discontinuities and the surge of the unexpected. Besides, in its light, history can look more like a *history of losses* than of gains, another rejoinder with Foucault and his insistence on the hecatomb of empirical knowledge in modernity and the possibility or even necessity of *retours de savoirs* if we are going to continue thinking.

Body History and Medicine

In collaboration with Professor Barbara Duden, Illich has inaugurated a chapter of history or better a discipline in which the aims of *Zeitgeschichte* become very clear. It is *body history*. What is body history, also termed *historical somatics*? It is the search for the *felt body* of past epochs and the history of the steps of its repression by the modern imputation of a mapped, anatomical body.

In the history of this *felt body* and its successive transmogrifications, the "theological paradox" can become an expression of the "*corruption optimi quae est pessima*," the corruption of the best which is the worst. The culture that took shape around the celebration of the Incarnation is precisely the one that has buried the vivacity of the perception of oneself, and silenced the flesh under layers and layers of writs and prescriptions. This betrayal of the word

and of the flesh, and of their proportional relation, finds today a clear expression in philosophy as well as in medicine. The *soma* as self-perception of the body does not interest any scientific discipline. Only the anatomically mapped body is a “scientific fact.” The flesh of the dead is an unexplored territory of history. Western philosophy looks like an attempt to say something reasonable without ever considering the body.²⁰ Modern medicine has become the “bedside anatomy” of a still living corpse.²¹

Ivan Illich and Barbara Duden endeavored to “recover past somatic experience,” that is the lived flesh of past epochs, not the representation of the body of other times by the history of medicine or art history. They wanted to study the *soma*, meaning by that, “what people mean when they say ‘I,’” that is the “felt body” as an incarnated self. They coined the catchword *body history* and established it as the name of a discipline.

As body history takes shape, we are able to understand how each historical moment is incarnated in an epoch-specific body. We now begin to decipher the body of subjective experience as a unique enfleshment of an age’s ethos.²²

The betrayal of this carnal presence to oneself and to the neighbor has two consequences: first a totalitarian hetero-definition of the body—today in bio-medical guise—,second, the imputation of a somatic experience founded on a professional exegesis of the lived body. *Body history* or *historical somatics* is “the study of the *soma*’s autoception.”

Of Illich’s studies before her collaboration with him, Barbara Duden writes:

²⁰This sentence was pronounced by the chair of the Philosophy Department, Professor Joseph Kockelmans, at the occasion of a meeting with Ivan Illich and Barbara Duden at Penn State University.

²¹Foucault, Michel, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, New York: Pantheon, 1973.

²²Illich, Ivan, “Nachwort” in ---. *Die Nemesis der Medizin*, München: Beck Verlag, 1995, p. 206.

These studies allowed him to recognize the heterogeneity of the flesh, the soma of old and the contemporary technogenic science-attributed and self-inflicted body.²³

In the 1970's, Illich wrote a critique of medical services aimed at illustrating the counter-productivity of all service producing institutions beyond "certain thresholds" of size and power.²⁴ The working title of this essay was "Limits to Medicine." Twenty-five years later, he was able to analyze modern (bio-) medicine and its unlimited claims to truth and power as a lab for the thwarting of incarnate self-perceptions and the production of a "technogenic, science-attributed and self-inflicted body." He wrote:

I want to indict health care not as a demoralizing but as a nihilist activity. The decisive result of every brush with the health care system today is epistemic – a recasting of the ego -
What is done in the pursuit of health boomerangs as an interpretation of the self.²⁵

In *The Rivers North of the Future*, a volume of interviews of Illich by David Cayley,²⁶ Ivan stresses the point that, among all disciplines of Western knowledge, the medical arts were among the last to have been reshaped and "scientificized" by the introduction of the instrumental mind-frame. Professor Samar Farage's study of ancient Arab medicine shows how important the notion of proportionality was for the medieval *hakim* (for instance, in the *mimesis* with the patient) and also how many diversified, carnal, common sense forms of hygienic knowledge

²³Duden, Barbara, "The Quest for Past Somatics," in Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham (eds.), *The Challenges of Ivan Illich*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002, S. 226. Read the expression of her irritation at Illich's contention that he had written *Medical Nemesis* "just" to illustrate the counter-productivity of a specific service institution. She proposes nothing less than to re-write this book in the light of the somatic intuitions gained by body history. Yet, those who knew Illich well will not escape the hunch that this reductionist view of his previous work was a didactic pointer to something more important, like saying "watch out, this is new stuff."

²⁴ Ivan Illich, *Medical Nemesis. The Expropriation of Health*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1976.

²⁵ Ivan Illich, "Vorwort," loc. Cit., p. 212.

²⁶ David Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future. The Testament of Ivan Illich as Told to David Cayley*, loc. ct..

have been extinguished by the instrumentalization of medicine. In a reading of ancient sources in classical Arabic, Professor Farage recovers many of these forms of “pre-instrumental,” proportional, medical knowledge (for instance the ability to perceive several kinds of pulse). On my imaginary stage, I fancy that Barbara Duden could lead a panel of the history of the body in which Samar Farage would bring examples from Arab medicine.

History of the Gaze

For Illich and Duden, *body history* led to a *history of the gaze*, premonitory of a history of the carnal and the inner senses.

What we were looking for was to unlock the doors to the perception and the ethical orientation of a human activity, namely the act of looking²⁷.

They carefully explored three ways of distinguishing a historic reality from its modern form: 1. *opsis*, the knowledge of the active visual ray versus *optics*, the knowledge of the light ray; 2. the *gaze*, that is the act of looking by which I establish a relation with a being or a thing versus the *elaboration of an image*, be it on a screen, a photograph, or in what is called today “space”; 3. the *visibilia* born out of the *copula* of a radiating sensorial truth with my visual ray versus the *eye* conceived instrumentally as a camera, a scanner or a *de-codifier of optic phenomena*.

According to Duden,

²⁷ Barbara Duden, “De oculo morali”: Ivan Illich zur Blickgeschichte und zum bedrohten Blicken heute,” Gabriele Wimböck, Karin Leonhard, Markus Friedrich, ed., *Evidentia, Reichweiten visueller Wahrnehmung in der frühen Neuzeit*, published by *Pluralisierung und Autorität, Sonderforschungsbereich 573*, Munich, Münster, University of Munich/Litt Verlag, 2007, pp. 481-503.

[f]or Illich, it was equally important to avoid reducing the act of looking to an activity of the eye, but to consider it rather as an act involving the whole person with heart, soul, flesh and blood, mind, and inner senses.²⁸

In short, the *gaze* is seen here as a form of behavior which is *historical* and can be studied under its epoch-specific modalities. Historically, there is no general frame for the analysis of the antique, the classical, the medieval or the early modern gaze: nothing comparable to the consumption of images on screens. To reduce past *scopic* perceptions to the consumption of images is to colonize the past with modern concepts, percepts, and prejudices. It is what *development history* does and what Illich absolutely refused to do. His “disciplined, courageous and extravagant studies”²⁹ search the past, not for “origins” of present situations, but for lost perceptual modes allowing him to gain distance from the axiomatic certainties and unquestioned assumptions of the present.

Proportionality of Ear and Sound, of Music & the Demise of the Great Tradition

To the difference between *opsis* vs *optics*, *gaze* vs *elaboration of images*, the perception of *visibilia* vs the *decoding of optic phenomena* that Illich and Duden analyzed in the *history of the gaze* corresponds, in the history of sound perception, the opposition between the *proportional relation of ear and sound* vs a scientific *acoustic theory* for which the act of hearing is a-historically reduced to the record of vibrations of given frequencies.

Professor Matthias Rieger³⁰ has studied the history of music in the transition from a proportional to a scientific, allegedly “natural” and “universal” understanding of ear and sound.

²⁸ Barbara Duden, “*De oculo morali...*,” loc. cit., p. 484.

²⁹ Barbara Duden, loc. cit., p. 482.

³⁰ *Helmholtz musicus*, op. cit..

Before scientific acoustics, there was no sound without an ear. The *musical tone* was the incarnation of the proportionality between sound and ear, just as the intelligibility of the world was a proportional relation between sensible reality and reason. The rupture of the balance of the humors in medicine (Farage), the transition, in music, from the Pythagorean consonances to chains of well-tempered instrumental accords, the redefinition of the economy as economics, a theory of scarcity and of equity as arithmetical equality, as well as the drift of architecture toward functionalism, are, according to Rieger and Illich, symptoms of the demise of the Great Tradition of Proportionality. In the mirror of that tradition, modernity could be characterized as the epoch of disproportionality.

Critique of Scarcity as a Social Construction

While Illich's conversations with Professor Barbara Duden allowed him to radically reformulate the thesis of *Medical Nemesis* asking what modern, instrumental medicine *says* rather than what it *does*, his conversations with Professor Teodor Shanin have deepened his capacity of estrangement from modern economic certainties already questioned in his early works.

The fundamental axiom of formal economics and economy, defined as the assignation of limited means to alternative (read unlimited) ends is *scarcity*. *Scarcity* is the ever-widening gap between limited means and unlimited needs, wants or desires. Under its derivatives like *utility* or *opportunity*, it can be expressed in mathematical functions whose *maxima* and *minima* can be determined and *derivates* calculated. In other words, *scarcity* makes of economics what Foucault calls a *formal knowledge* that can even be thoroughly mathematized.³¹

³¹ *Les mots et les choses*, Paris : Gallimard, 1966, p. 261.

Yet, economics pretends to have an empirical side, in other words, there are or there have been *empirical economic knowledges* and, according to Foucault, some or even most of them might have been suppressed by the great movement of the *formalization of empirical knowledge* that started in the XVIIIth century. This suppression of (empirical) forms of knowledge is what Illich meant by the neologism *disvalue*, defined as the suppression of vernacular abilities and skills that allowed people to produce *values of use*, and to *subsist* from them, a suppression that was necessary to make households dependant on *exchange values*. Before what Marx, and after him Rosa Luxemburg, analyzed as *primitive accumulation* (a typical concept of *development history* that, by *petitio principii*, presupposes a primitive predominance of exchange values), *disvalue*,³² the destruction of vernacular “values,” abilities and knowledges, had to create the need for substitutive commodities. In this view, the march to a modern market society is not at all an elevation to a post-scarcity paradise but a progressive enforcement of the iron law of scarcity that now rules even the most abundant goods (example: water³³).

Marx, in this a good pupil of Ricardo, could never free himself from the law of scarcity,³⁴ which led a famous historian of economic thought to classify him as a not too deviant member of the *liberal tradition*.³⁵ This insight must lead to a revisiting of his theses about the subordination of *superstructures* to (“economic”) *infrastructures*. How could a theory based on scientific

³² I would contend that, like the founding act of uprooting ecological mutual support relations in order to establish a *chôra*, *disvalue* is the true founding act of modern economics and economies. It institutionalizes scarcity and makes not only a market society possible, but also a *development history of economics*. Illich’s sketches of a *Zeitgeschichte of economics* is a sign that he considered modern economics a dead end, a “dismal field” on which nothing more should be founded.

³³ Jean Robert, *Water Is a Commons*, Mexico City: Habitat International Coalition, 1992. Though almost self-evident in the standard definition of economics, the relation between *instrumentality* and *scarcity* needs to be elucidated.

³⁴ Paul Dumouchel, “L’Ambivalence de la rareté,” in Paul Dumouchel et Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *L’Enfer des Choses*, Paris : Seuil, 1979.

³⁵ Louis Dumont, *From Mandeville to Marx. The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

constructs³⁶ be the substratum of all manifestations of culture, science, politics or the arts? Yet, particularly in his study of the remote medieval origins of some of the concepts, percepts and habits that coalesced into the birth of modern times, like the *individual, instrumental cause* or *silent reading*, Illich has often given Marxist (“development”) historians the impression that he put *superstructures* at the bottom, where *infrastructures* should be. Teodor Shanin, after an ongoing conversation of more than thirty years on that topic with him, concluded saying: “it is when a theory meets its internal contradictions that it becomes interesting.”

Professor Shanin, one of the world’s most knowledgeable scholars of the history and the sociology of *peasants*, thinks—not quite unlike Foucault—that formal, and *a fortiori* mathematical, economics is a veneer of formalized and self-consistent conceptualizations concealing the contradictions of the real world, or expelling them at its margins.

At margins, lay forms of political economy which are structured differently from the prevailing system, its general dynamics and its assumed logic (to a Marxist, the dominant mode of production). Once evolutionism is injected (or taken for granted [in the form of a development history of economic ideas, for instance, N.E.], the status of the margins becomes that of the not-yet-dissolved “past in present” and/or a cul-de-sac with no autonomous dynamic and no long-term future. Their survival is due to social inertia and/or to the transitional service they may offer to the core/mainstream of power and economy, dynamics, and forms. The margins’ subsumption to the core must result in their eventual demise.³⁷

³⁶ Sajay Samuel, “In defense of vernacular ways” in (eds) J. Murton, D. Bavington, & C. Dokis *Subsistence under Capitalism* McGill University Press 2016, argues for the distinction between scientific constructs and commonsense concepts.

³⁷ Teodor Shanin, “Expolarly Economies: A Political Economy of the Margins. Agenda for the Study of Modes of Non-Incorporation as Parallel Forms of Social Economy,” *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1988, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 1.

At these margins, where “the not-yet-dissolved” supposedly lay, are the never quite extinguished forms of what Polanyi called *the livelihood of man*, the means by which most historical societies have shaped their sense of “the good life” in relative affluence, creating original and diverse *material cultures*, generally without most supposed precursors of the modern economic nexus. Shanin gives right to Alexander Chayanov, the soviet agrarian economist executed in 1937 for his alleged “revisionist” conception of the economy of peasants and his opposition to their proletarianization and/or reduction to the *kolkhose*. According to Shanin, in a world increasingly deprived of peasants and other traditional direct producers—people who eat what they produce and produce what they eat — Chayanov’s “peasant economy,” becomes paradoxically very important because, with the foreseeable collapse of dominant formal economies more and more people will have to make a living among their remainders, *on the margins* of a vanishing world. Thus, any ill-advised attempt on their part to “live following the old rules” will only throw them into misery, which is poverty deprived of autonomous means of subsistence or *livelihood*.

In an article written at the moment of the collapse of the state-planned pole of formal economies, and the trumpeted “victory” of the free-market pole, Teodor Shanin insisted on the existence of economic practices that belonged to neither poles. He defined them negatively as *expolary*, of neither pole:

The term “expolary” was used to circumscribe a territory which tends to escape systematic viewing but is central for the realistic study of the economic and social forms of our time. One can speak of it alternatively as of the modes of non-incorporation into the dominant political economy, ever remembering the relative and partial nature of such “non-incorporations.” Social and functional characteristics which are particular, which

combine, and which consistently differ from the assumed logic of “the poles” of state economy and market economy *sensu strictu* define it positively. To test its significance and to specify its characteristics is to establish analytically and empirically the alternative ways expolary economies operate vis-a-vis the dominant political economies of “state plan” or “free market” and especially the industrial/bureaucratic complexes at their centre.³⁸

There is a *development history* of economic ideas and realities in which nature, logic or the “forces of history” would contribute to the blossoming of the “mature economy” to come—be it the “perfect market” or the “communist paradise”—whose historical forms were necessary evolutionary steps. However, this evolutionary optimism is increasingly contradicted by the growth of misery at the margins of all known formal economies and by diseconomies and frustrations at their core. What Shanin proposes here, is to adopt a view of (economic) history more open to discontinuities and surprises. He often mentions the example of the very effective improvisation of “expolary” forms of economic relations combining the “old and the new,” “the legal and the illegal,” “economic goals with the pursuit of a way of life” that allowed the Russian people to survive the collapse of the Soviet economic system after 1992.

In my imaginary stage, I dream of inviting Professor Shanin to lead or contribute to a panel (this reserve in consideration of the linguistic difficulty: Professor Shanin does not speak French) on “livelihood and economy after the collapse of economics” in which I hope to count with the participation of members of the MAUSS (*Mouvement anti-utilitariste en sciences*

³⁸ Teodor Shanin, loc.cit., p. 7 (my numeration).

sociales), of *La Ligne d'Horizon, Association des amis de François Partant*, as well as of other non-conventional economic critics and observers of “what happens at the margins.”

Another, in my opinion, very important participant to the *Livelihood After the Economy?* panel should be Gustavo Esteva, in his own terms a *deprofessionalized intellectual*, winner of Mexico's National Economics Award, co-founder of the *Universidad de la Tierra*, and of several associations supporting peasant and village life and author of many books in Spanish and English.³⁹ The concept of *disvalue* is essential to his understanding of the present war on village subsistence fought against Mexican peasants by economic and political powers.

Illich's Contributions to These Critical “Economic” Reflections

During the period of what he later called his “pamphlets” (*Deschooling Society, Energy and Equity, Medical Nemesis*), Illich felt the urge to make a radical economic statement. In a way, it was a response to the Club of Rome's proposal of reorienting the economy from the intensive and polluting production of short-lived material goods to a multiplication of immaterial services that supposedly wouldn't harm nature. In the early 1970's, from Cuernavaca, Mexico, Illich claimed that “beyond certain thresholds, the production of services would do more harm to culture than the production of goods has already done to nature.” It is in order to demonstrate it with concrete examples that he successively analyzed the counter-productivity of industrial education, transport and housing, as well as health services.

In the 1980's, in short articles and still more in conversations with friends and colleagues, Illich started to address the axiomatic certainties that underlie modern “social theorems.” But,

³⁹ See for instance: David Barkin, Gustavo Esteva: *Inflación y democracia. El caso de México*, Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1979; Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Suri Prakash, *Grassroots Post-Modernism*, London and New York: Zed Books, 1998.

contrary to historians of economic ideas who, like Paul Dumouchel, for instance, retraced the historical phases of the social construction of *scarcity*,⁴⁰ the fundamental axiom of all formal economic theories, Illich paid attention to its alleged perceived manifestations as *needs*, *values* (the “need” for them), *waste* and *disvalue*. Each of these topics was the object of controversies with certain specific groups or personal friends. *Needs* was the object of Illich’s contribution to the collective that wrote and edited the *Development Dictionary*.⁴¹ *Values* were first discussed in the context of the opposition *values of use* vs *values of exchange* or vernacular “*values*” vs *commodities*. A more radical step was then taken, that opposed *value* to the sense of the *good*. *Waste*, as the material final stage of all economically produced *value*, was opposed to the metaphorical use of the eminently abstract thermodynamic notion, *entropy*, by a collective of Japanese alternative economists and social scientists who had founded an institute called the *Japanese Entropy Society*. Elaborating on the notion of waste production as a way to create, maintain and even increase a “convenient level of market dependency,”⁴² one could say, paraphrasing the Norwegian criminologist Nils Christie, that the maintenance of a commodity-intensive economy requires the constant production of “a suitable amount of waste.” Yet, if “immaterial services” could possibly substitute for the production of material goods—in fact an illusion, since the production of services induces needs for more material goods and reciprocally the economic role of *wasting* as programmed obsolescence or as simple garbage production would be entirely played by *disvalue*—then the result would be the destruction of vernacular

⁴⁰ One exception, at least as far as the title is concerned, is Ivan Illich, “Einführung in die Kulturgeschichte der Knappheit” (Introduction to the cultural history of scarcity), Stephan Pfürtner, ed., *Wider den Turmbau zu Babel. Disput mit Ivan Illich* (Against the (re)construction of the Babel tower), Reinbek bei Hamburg : rororo aktuell, 1985, pp. 12-17.

⁴¹ Ivan Illich, “Needs,” Wolfgang Sachs, ed., *The Development Dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, London, Zed Books, 1992, pp. 88-101.

⁴² For a comparable argument in an apparently different domain, see Nils Christie, *A Suitable Amount of Crime*, London, Routledge, 2004. An outstanding Norwegian criminologist, Professor Christie has been in conversation with Ivan Illich for more than two decades.

abilities and “values” that sustained people’s livelihood in a complete or relative autonomy from the market and its “laws.” In fact, in economies that multiply services and simultaneously intensify the production of material goods, material, visible *waste* and less directly perceptible *disvalue* go hand in hand.⁴³ On my imaginary stage, Professor Nils Christie would lead a panel on “a suitable amount of crime” as a metonym for disvalue.

After years of disseminating his economic intuitions in short essays and above all in conversations with friends in which K. Polanyi,⁴⁴ E.P. Thompson,⁴⁵ C.B. MacPherson,⁴⁶ L. Kohr,⁴⁷ E. Halévy,⁴⁸ and P. Dumouchel were recurring references, Illich finally suggested that he might finally write a “history of scarcity” as a radical critique to all formal economics. Years later, he received a parcel from the Netherlands containing a book by the Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis whose dedicatory read: “Dear Ivan, since you never wrote the book of the history of scarcity you had promised, I had to write it.”⁴⁹

The Ultimate Scarcity: The Impoverishment of Sensory Experience and the “Loss of the Senses”

⁴³ Ivan Illich, “Alternatives to Economics: Towards a History of Waste,” speech to *The Eastern Economic Association Meeting, Human Economy Session*, Boston, March 11, 1988.

Waste, “garbage,” reveals the true foundation of economics which is *disvalue*. Disvalue has historical and logical priority over (economic) values: before any values can be produced, autonomous and vernacular abilities and knowledges must be destroyed in order to create the need that will justify these values. This essay is Illich’s response to his Japanese friends Yoshiro Tamanoy, Atsuchi Tsuchida, and Taskeshi Murota, “Towards an entropic theory of economy and ecology,” in: *Économie appliquée*, Vol. XXXVII, 1984, No 2, p. 279-294. Contrary to the scientific concept, *entropy*, out of place in social theory, *disvalue* is a genuine social-theoretical concept.

⁴⁴ *The Great Transformation*, New York: Octagon Books, 1975.

⁴⁵ *The Making of the English Working Class*, New York: Random House, 1966.

⁴⁶ *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

⁴⁷ *The Breakdown of Nations*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, New York, 1986 [1857].

⁴⁸ *The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism*, Kelly reprint, 1972.

⁴⁹ Hans Achterhuis, *Het rijk van de schaarste, van Thomas Hobbes tot Michel Foucault* (The Empire of Scarcity, from T. Hobbes to M. Foucault), Utrecht (Pays-BAS), Ambo, 1988.

True to his historiographic ethics, Illich always refused to project modern concepts and certainties upon the past. He could eventually coin a modern word there where “epochal terms” (Kuchenbuch) led to misunderstandings—like, for instance, *proportionality* instead of the genuine Greek term *analogía*, whose cooptation by modern discourse obscures its original meaning. But he wanted to approach the dead and their perceptions of the world, their *autoception*, their body and the stuffs that permeated it without thwarting them under the shadow of modern falsely universal certainties and the associated words and concepts.

Aspects of the Reception of Ivan Illich’s Ideas

A French participant in the seminars at CIDOC, Cuernavaca, in the 1970’s summarized, twenty years later, “the rise and fall” of the popularity of Illich’s theses more or less in those terms:

From 1970 to 1980, Illich’s radical critique to the main institutions of industrial society was thrilling. Imagine you were a teacher at a French *lycée* or a medical doctor working for an insurance company. You felt that something in your practice was not at the height of your youthful ideals, but in order to give expression to your discontent, you needed more than one glass or two and the following morning, your insights went down the drain with your hangover. Perhaps you decided to spend a couple of weeks in Cuernavaca during your *congés payés*. If you were a doctor, you might have coincided with the hundreds of M.Ds who came to discuss *Medical Nemesis* with Illich, or with the authors of the *Cuernavaca Manifesto* on education if you were a teacher. You would have heard, for instance, a famous surgeon of Chicago’s main hospital interrupting Illich with the words: “No Mr. Illich, you are too bland! In reality, things are much worse than what you

describe.” After two of three weeks of what was finally a pleasant holiday, with a weekend or two in Acapulco, you would return, duly tanned, to your routines, and capture your colleagues’ attention for a couple of days, or weeks if you were a good storyteller.

As to the question, what Illich’s intentions were then, one has to read his early essays. In 1970, he wrote for instance:

It is my purpose to develop theoretical principles leading to a taxonomy of revolutionary transgressions, for the precise purpose of planning a revolutionary strategy aimed at a radical renewal of the Latin American system of public education. I call an act “revolutionary” only when its appearance within a culture establishes irrevocably a (significantly) new possibility, a trespass of cultural boundaries which beats a new path. A revolutionary act is the unexpected proof of a new social fact, which might have been foretold, expected, or even called for, but never before irrevocably shown as possible.⁵⁰

If one neglects some terms that the “later Illich” would no longer use in a positive sense, like *developing, planning, strategy, system*, the “revolutionary aim” of his career as a public thinker is clearly stated: give the proof of a new social fact that had never before been irrevocably shown as possible. In the 1970s, the fact that was perhaps “expected and called for” was double: 1. the path of industrialization leads to a dead end and is particularly destructive as “development of the third world”; 2. the possibility of a radical *institutional inversion* that would liberate modern tools’ potential aptitude for enhancing the autonomy of individuals and small groups only needed to be demonstrated.

⁵⁰ Ivan Illich, “Dissidence, Deviance and Delinquency in Style,” *The Dawn of the Epimethean Man and other Essays*, CIDOC Cuaderno No 54, Cuernavaca, 1970, p. 8/1.

Illich, with the exception of a few bouts generally motivated by an irrepressible indignation, was not a social militant but an extraordinarily hardworking thinker who often crafted his phrases by reading them aloud to friends until they *fitted*. He considered his duty to document facts and, as far as possible, establish the truth about them. In the 1970s, he repeatedly claimed that his ambition was to prepare “the great debates of the end of the XXth century” writing “the epilogue of industrial society.” I personally belong to those who consider that exploring the paths he opened to be well worth the hard work.

Yet, not every doctor, teacher, architect or social worker who came to Cuernavaca was ready to “pay the price” of a radical critique that was inevitably an auto-critique. According to a New York saying, “old age is not for sissies.” The same can be said of maintaining a critical attitude up to old age. What, according to our French friend, happened is that many participants to Illich’s seminars danced at the drum of Cuernavaca —with its *mariachis*, its bougainvillea, and its tutelary volcanoes —only as long as their check was coming at the end of the month and their professional position unthreatened.

The 1980s were the beginning of the end of the *trente glorieuses*, the thirty “glorious years” after WW2, when capitalism showed a relatively human face, workers gained “victories,” and jobs offered “security.” In an increasingly turbulent economic environment, people who had had an ear for Illich five or ten years earlier, now listened to the “voice of reason”: Full employment can be restored if people follow the discipline of market economy. Think of your children’s future. Be cool, don’t make waves. As an example of admonitions to this alleged “return to reason,” I would mention the beautifully acted film by Michel Albert and Jean-Claude Guillebaud, in which an aging but frisky Yves Montand warns the French with a series of courteous but firm “if not, then.” It would be interesting to analyze why this kind of message

doesn't pass at all today. Today, as Gustavo Esteva would say, such exhortations are met with either an embarrassed smile or a sardonic laughter.

One after the other, the broken dreams have become nightmares: dreams of industrialization, of urbanization, of economic growth, of development and progress. The dreams of the American way of life and of capitalism, but also of socialism are but ruins. In their wake, the horror is still there. Every calamity, be it natural or social, bears the mark of an injustice, in a world where less than one hundred persons own more material riches than all other men and women, and where this gap is widening.⁵¹

The great debates of the ending XXth century, for which Illich and his friends were preparing themselves, did not occur. In order for these debates to have been possible, an “epistemic continuity” with the thrust of Illich’s early critique would have had to be maintained. For instance, his analysis of the *counter-productivity* of modern tools and institutions (“institutions-as-tools”) presupposed that it was in the nature of tools to serve the *personal* purposes of carnal users. After 1980, the nature of what was still called “tools” began to change so radically, that the concepts used twenty years earlier to analyze them seemingly ceased to address the predicaments of the new epoch.

Among all of Illich’s books from those years, *Tools for Conviviality*⁵² is the one that could more convincingly be claimed to be a “revolutionary act” aiming at establishing a new possibility, that is to prove a new social fact “which might have been foretold, expected, or even called for, but never before irrevocably shown as possible.” In the last period of his career, Illich

⁵¹ Gustavo Esteva and friends, *Célébration du réveil*, manifesto signed by participants in the seminar *Conviviality in the Era of Systems* celebrated in Cuernavaca in memory of Ivan Illich, December 2007.

⁵² New York: Pantheon, 1973.

showed that this premonition, this eagerness for freedom, had indeed a long history. In 1128, a monk who was also a goldsmith, Theophilus Presbyter, had published a book, whose *incipit* was *De variis artibus*,⁵³ that showed the benches of several craftsmen, displaying their specific tools as if they were offering themselves to him or her who wanted to take them. A contemporary witness seemed to document a certain unease with that display, as if it were somehow indecent to expose tools independently from the hand to which they traditionally belonged.⁵⁴

This, and several other later works and inventions by craftsmen as well as by Schoolmen, progressively established *instrumentum*, the tool, as a root-metaphor for any artifact or arrangement that incorporated an intentionality. The instrumental age was the epoch during which there were ever more tools around for ever more personal goals. But it was also the time in which every act, every moment, every achievement was increasingly seen as an instrumental means to reach something else, supposedly better. The instrumental age multiplied means to personal ends, but the instrumental mind-frame progressively killed all gratuity and all sense of “enjoying something for itself.”

The Critique of Industrial Tools, Technology, *La Technique*: Ellul and Illich

As the last phase of the instrumental age, the industrial period had aggregated potentially liberating artifacts into contraptions, machines, “technological systems” that, by their oversized dimensions and the excessive power that they concentrated in the hands or under the buttocks of few individual users, encroached upon most people’s autonomy, freedom, and rights. Besides,

⁵³ See C.R. Dodwell, *Theophilus, Presbyter: The Various Arts*. New York: T. Nelson, 1961.

⁵⁴ See Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text. A Commentary to Hugh’s “Didascalicon,”* Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1993. Hugh’s *Didascalicon* was equally published in 1128. Hugh acknowledges the birth of a new attitude towards what he calls *mechanica*, a word whose etymology he erroneously retraces to the Greek word *moichos*, adulterer, an error that expresses a moral judgment on the new attitude.

beyond certain thresholds, they became counter-productive even for their users. The automobile is the paradigm of a disproportional aggregation of a few inventions which were the jewels of XIXth century mechanics, and, combined in another manner, produced the best example of an intrinsically *convivial tool*, the bicycle.

The social fact, “which might have been foretold, expected, or even called for, but never before irrevocably shown as possible” was that dismantling industrial arrangements without rejecting the basic inventions that founded them could liberate the true potentialities of tools, *enhancing their users’ autonomy and productive liberties* rather than “satisfying their needs.” For the still non-industrialized nations, the *fact* was that another path was still open to them. This fact has never been invalidated. Yet, it has been obscured by a change in the conception and perception of what a tool is.

In 1977, Jacques Ellul wrote:

Until recently, the great technical ensembles had little mutual interrelations: twenty-five years ago, it was not yet possible to speak of a *système technicien* (“technological system”) because all there was, was a growth of *la technique* (“technology”) in all realms of human activity, but, since this growth was still anarchic, these realms remained specified by the conventional division of human operations; there was no relation between them.⁵⁵

What Ellul had previously called *La Technique*⁵⁶ --a mind-frame rather than only a toolbox – was progressively transforming itself into the *technological system*. What is at the root of the

⁵⁵ Jacques Ellul, *Le système technicien*, Paris : Calmann-Lévy, 1977.

⁵⁶ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, New York, Knopf, 1964, translation of *La Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle*, Paris : Armand Colin, 1954.

transformation of the technological society into a system? According to Illich, it is the demise of *instrumentality*, an ultimate step toward dis-incarnation that frustrates “tool” users from their former liberties making a mockery of the previously unquestioned *personal* character of purposes and intentionalities. As to Ellul, he ascribes the bolting together of loose relations between specific technologies into a system of interconnected parts or subsystems to computerized informatics whose “...function it is to allow the immediate, flexible, informal, and purely technical junction between all technical subsystems.”⁵⁷ Yet, a commentator of Jacques Ellul points out that Ellul understood perfectly what, for Ivan Illich, was the *crux* of the transmogrification of the *technological society* into a *system*: in the latter, “the instrumentalist approach of “technology” is no longer relevant.”⁵⁸ Why then continue to speak of “technique” and “technology” if what was the technological era’s historical characteristic, the use of tools for *personal* purposes, is rapidly vanishing? Yet, besides divergences in linguistic usage, there are many affinities between Ellul’s and Illich’s thought.

Both perceived fatal omens in the growing power of the *technological system* (Ellul) or of *the System* and its never-ending *show* that, according to Illich, swallows up the *personal* ends, finalities or intentionalities at the service of which the classical tool was. Both detected in this demise a betrayal of the vocation of the West to itself. This vocation was a call to freedom. Tools are only compatible with freedom if they can be *taken* or *left* at will. According to Illich, systems are no tools because they can hardly be left once “taken,” or, more exactly, once a “technological” system has taken, swallowed you and transformed you into one more of its

⁵⁷ Jacques Ellul, “La technique considérée en tant que système », *Cahiers Jacques Ellul* no 2, *La Technique*, Bordeaux, March 2004 (1977).

⁵⁸ Pierre de Conninck, “Pour une approche constructive de l’autonomie de la technique,” Patrick Troude-Chastenet, *Sur Jacques Ellul*, Bordeaux : L’esprit du Temps, 1994.

subsystems. In 1993, in Bordeaux, at a meeting in honor of Jacques Ellul, Ivan Illich recognized his debt toward him:

I strove to follow you in a filial spirit, with all the false steps that it implies. Accept the harvest; I hope you will distinguish the flowers among what you might see as weeds. I thus express my gratitude toward a master to whom I owe an orientation that definitively influenced my path since forty years.⁵⁹

In my inner stage, I fancy that Professor Daniel Cérézuelle could lead a panel on the profound sense for one's and the other's incarnate presence shared by three authors that he likes: Bernard Charbonneau, Jacques Ellul and Ivan Illich (in order of seniority).⁶⁰

Critique of the Late Dominant Professions, of “Professionalism” and its Aftermath:

The Demise of the Professional and the Rise of the “Facilitator”

It is here that my “regressive” method meets its limits. To approach this theme, I should have presented the debates at CIDOC in the 1970's as the first instance of a radical critique of the then still dominant professions, and I should have gone from there to Illich's autocritique of his failure, then, to consider the role of professional associations. Considering it, it becomes obvious that professionals held the three powers whose concentration, on one hand, America's Founding Fathers considered the mark of despotism. A medical doctor, for instance, has the power to diagnose, a form of *legislative power*, to prescribe a cure, an *executive power*, and,

⁵⁹ Ivan Illich, „Hommage d'Ivan Illich à Jacques Ellul,” *La perte des sens*, Paris : Fayard, 2004, p. 153, 154, (poorly) re-translated from the French.

⁶⁰ Daniel Cérézuelle, “De l'exigence d'incarnation à la critique de la technique chez Jacques Ellul, Bernard Charbonneau et Ivan Illich, Patrick Troude-Chastenet, ed., *Jacques Ellul, Penseur sans frontières*, Bordeaux : L'Esprit du Temps, 2005, pp. 227-247.

through his professional association, to sue any patient or colleague who deviates from the norm, a *judicial power*.

Starting in conversations with Ivan Illich, Professor Sajay Samuel has studied the encroachments on democratic principles perpetrated by professionals since the mid XIXth century, and, still more important, the profound changes affecting the professional-client relation since the last two decades of the XXth century. He has paid particular attention to the shift from a relation mediated by the concept of *needs* to one dominated by the notion of *decision*. I dream of hearing Sajay explaining to us why professions were inherently anti-democratic and why their rapid demise announces the era of apparently “gentle” facilitators whose role is in fact to be *interfaces* between their clients and the system. In the case of medical facilitators, their clients are *patients* and their role as *interfaces* is to transform them into subsystems of the biomedical system.

Dr Silja Samerski has her PhD in genetics by carefully listening to the women attending the (not yet) obligatory genetic consultations in a German town. Her observations fully confirm the hypothesis that the new personage alternatively dubbed *facilitator* or *counselor* is something very different from the professional of yesteryear. She writes:

In this work, [...] I will discuss in which measure the conversations between pregnant women and genetic counselors are exemplary of a transmogrification of the notion of *decision*. I will then examine the new significances of the term, *decision*, introduced by the counselors and follow the implications and consequences of this new way of thinking for pregnant women in particular and more generally for the clients of the innumerable counselors of all types presently offering their services.⁶¹

⁶¹ Silja Samerski, “*Sie müssen irgendwann ‘ne Entscheidung treffen’ Eine Untersuchung über die Popularisierung eines neuen Entscheidungsbegriffes in professionellen Beratungsgesprächen, dargestellt am Beispiel der*

Late Night Thoughts

There is a theme that I avoided to approach frontally—it is theology. The first, obvious reason is that I want to eschew all form of soft theology. The second is that I want to be true to the apophatic attitude that author Ivan Illich maintained during most of his works. The third is my intuition that his faith, more than his theology was perhaps his platform of departure, but that his arrival platform was history, the discipline, but also his commitment to his fellow historians of all persuasion. Some of you might desire to discuss the comparison sometimes made between his attitude and Dietrich Bonhöffer's, the German theologian who preached a non-religious faith in the Gospel: I will not be on this panel. On several occasions, David Cayley and Lee Hoinacki have presented the difficult theme of the distinction between *mysterium iniquitatis* and *corruption optimi quae est pessima*. I hope that they will be invited. What both have to say goes much beyond theology. Cayley is the author of a series of interviews with Ivan Illich that have revealed surprising aspects of his personality, and Hoinacki has been Illich's mentor in English stylistics for more than thirty years. The deep reason for my oblique interest in theology is my inner necessity to define a *hexis*, an attitude, toward possible impending catastrophic changes about which I don't want to speculate. I would like to be able to say, like Ivan: "I don't want to live under the shadow of the future." How could one say, today, „*Und auch wenn ich wüsste, dass die Welt morgen unterginge, doch plänz'ich noch heute mein Apfelbäumlein?*“

genetischen Beratung. („You will finally have to take a decision.” A study of the popularization of a new concept of decision in the conversations between counselors and their clients, illustrated by the example of the genetic consultation. Doctoral dissertation, University of Bremen, 2001.

And even if I knew that the world would end tomorrow but am I still planting my apple tree today?

Another theme has been neglected in this thematic sketch—it is friendship.

I didn't speak of it in order to leave it virgin. And yes, I didn't speak explicitly of the vernacular genre either, but this theme can be treated as an aspect of proportionality—unless it's the other way around. Now, after this exercise of a “gradual-regressive” approach, we are, at last, ready to revisit Illich's critiques of service institutions and his theory (vision) of tools.