

Are You Plurofuturo?

All eras are both grim and wonderful. People who experienced the last world war tell tales of danger and hardship, and also describe feelings of exaltation. I can say today that I have always felt greater admiration for a single mother living on the outskirts of Paris and working in the service industry than for all the so-called explorers whose sole adventure is to smile in front of the camera at the right moment while wearing a sponsor's logo branded on their chest.

For some, the struggle for freedom or subsistence survival is their primary concern, yet for a number of countries around the world the new and real challenge in our era is to stand up to contemporary mediocrity. Here, in France, a small country no longer centre-stage on the international scene, we have a schizophrenic country caught between masochistic suffering and grotesque pride. In the early 1970s, I was harassed by sects propounding a range of ideologies and prepared to fight to the death in the name of the people and to defend weird and wonderful ideas. [Fast forward...] Today I saw the film *Frances Ha* and can only conclude that in my era self-obsession has prevailed and sunk to a nadir, as seen in the tale of the poor little rich girl struggling to get by. The same can be said when seeing Indian tribes in French Guiana spending their social benefits on alcohol, having lost their social structure and references in a very short time, and seeking refuge in the hypnotic experience of hours in front of the television.

Such moral and physical decline has spread across the planet, and is a factor behind the cynical and disproportionate amassing of money with total disregard for any community interests. Here the loss of culture and the adoption of a foreign culture are used as weapons to create a confusion of values and to change models. Yet such a state of affairs is by no means inevitable. It is actually sketching our new ideological stances – in opposition. We shall endeavour to explain the articulations involved, doing so in simple terms. In an age when everyone seems to be a self-proclaimed philosopher, soci-

ologist or psychoanalyst, judging anything and everything, often without any thorough knowledge of any aspect, we shall attempt a lighter approach, following the example of the French singer Charles Trénet [*Ménilmontant*]: “I am not a poet, but I am moved.” The art of being light-hearted and serious.

When we observe our era, what can be said about the configuration and distribution of information and news, phenomena I have been observing for the past thirty years? We notice that the real issues are no longer arguments between religion and non-religion (war of civilisations?) or between conservatives and the apostles of Progress (rejection of mass production?), but rather between advocates of a single – Mono – proselytising model, and the proponents of plurality – the Pluros; it is between activists calling for justice and sustainability for the common good (Futuros) and the continuers persevering with an economy founded on amassing and exponential increase to a level destroying the environment – the Retros. This gives us one side with the pluralists (open and tolerant, believing or not believing in a religion); we shall dub them *Pluros*, as opposed to the *Monos* who believe in a fixed world order and vision, with or without religion, which they intend to impose everywhere. This is the true divide, crossing religions, philosophies and political parties.

My personal stance is against religion, for religion appears to me to be a harmful principle imposing compulsory rites and a static view of the world, and therefore runs counter to my aspiration for enlightened choices and change. It is precisely because of my stance against religion that I am prepared to defend the freedom of thought and conscience of tolerant Catholics, Jews, Buddhists and Muslims, i.e. able to accept other lifestyles and to see worlds other than their own. And I know that some of them will uphold my right to oppose religion through a humanist approach to thought. So we have the Pluros versus the Monos.

We also have the Futuros versus the Retros. There are people who defend established forms of order, including economic order and corporate order, plus different forms of political order and authoritarian bureaucratic or theocratic states. Their models go back a long way: arguing on the basis of their view from the past, they refuse any developments or change and are intent on forcing society to abide by such constraints. They are often proselytisers, as they think that their model should be enforced everywhere. The vision of the Futuros is in relation to others and is experimental; they refute the idea of any set and perfect order as this can lead to concentration-type societies. There is *no end of history*

(a stupid and dangerous idea advocated in the past by proponents of socialism as practised and by names such as Fukuyama, from 1989 on). They have a Darwinian vision of ongoing evolution, adapting to changes in the environment, with a diversity of solutions according to the place and circumstances.

Youth across the world thus have to choose a position in relation to these real boundaries; *Plurofuturos versus Monoretros*. The rest is nothing more than ideological dressing from the past. The younger generation has to experiment and experience across networks, as part of a vast and perpetual movement – HOPE! – built on three fundamental values: *knowledge at every age for enlightened choices, justice for genuine solidarity between human beings, and sustainability*, i.e. harmony in relationships with the environment, putting an end to pollution and destruction of the planet.

We shall now see what the consequences are for our lives, both politically and philosophically.

Arguing architecture in an age of plumbing

Never before has there been such an audience for philosophy café get-togethers, special issues of magazines devoted to a given issue, and for summary reports. Why? Because of a need for content, and because the age of television, once the Utopia for culture and knowledge for all, has sunk into vulgarity and rampant commercialism. Such a decline inevitably has consequences as it triggers a crisis affecting existing models: when actors and sport stars with nothing to say chat with talk-show hosts recruited for their skill in getting people to laugh, any learned or creative minds, anyone with an educational approach is promptly deemed a pretentious fool and, to make matters worse, they do not earn much so must be of no value at all.

The collapse has spread to the media and the political sphere. Surely it must now be time to organise K-Pride marches to celebrate Knowledge with a capital “K”, as it is the acquisition of knowledge (of the immediate environment and of universal sciences), plus a demanding mind and scientific questioning that can provide an individual, on adulthood, with the wherewithal to make individual choices. This is the basic condition required everywhere for freedom. This is the battle which the Plurofuturos

have to wage, for only too often the Monoretros rely on ignorance and limited, authoritarian, dogmatic knowledge operating in just one direction and enforced uncritically; or they can even rely on nothing, making it easier to manipulate the masses in a state of distress, with dealing and empty ideas, deadening any levels of awareness for societies where values are muddled and people are willing to buy any and every good-luck charm and follow the first guru to appear.

Following the same line chosen for these general considerations based on local examples (local here being the country named “France”), I shall describe a situation in 2014 that will soon become obsolete but can still cast some light from concrete cases to cover a much broader scope, the local-global, and also the timeless moment.

Thus France – the country which loves to lecture the entire world – found itself in crisis. 2014 was marked by an unprecedented democratic and structural crisis which it is relevant to analyse here as this cannot be seen as a case of an authoritarian regime or of an Anglo-Saxon-type democracy with the balance between a State with limits that has to operate efficiently and economic interests having to comply with rules on fair competition. What does this mean? While there can be revivals, and fortunately so, with the impetus of a drop-out of the base – DROP – through international pressure on the one hand and macro-economic and political pressure on the other, there is also the possibility of the people experiencing an ideological revival (HOPE) combining pragmatism, the need for imagination and clear awareness and ideas on environmental issues.

The French today are thus great specialists when it comes to restricting freedom of expression, doing so, of course, on the basis of the finest principles. A minority of the population will choose to elect politicians who come from the same background, who never move and who are elected to more than one public position. Economy-media-power have mutual and incestuous relationships cut off from the populace. And we – for I have doggedly continued to live in this country as it goes downhill, through a spirit of resistance and the determination to work for a revival of energy and forces – have not managed to avoid this cultural surrender, and despite our outstanding heritage (but put to inadequate and inappropriate use, being tied to a purely economic interests).

While the view as expressed here may be overstated, in a bid to highlight the obstacles currently encountered, it must be said that at present the country is being run by people who operate as if they

were plumbers (and this is no new phenomenon), by technocrats of limited capacities with no vision. No longer are there architects who speak and lay down the structural elements of the House of France, but rather plumbers and electricians who, to make matters worse, have a total disregard for architects and architecture, arguing for a simplistic vision of the concept of culture and having a disdainful attitude towards the populace. As a result, ignorance is no longer cause for guilt but a source of pride, as if it were a guarantee of truth, sincerity, and fraternity.

Another travesty exists alongside this cultural attrition: the practice of doing nothing, remaining immobile or impassive, and it is seen as a model of intellectual moderation and wisdom. It is true that in Europe, post WWII Christian democracy has managed to reconcile different communities, turning against extremes seen in the aberrations of history causing bloodshed and destroying freedom. In contrast, the spirit of caution, of a static, impassive stance (a *laissez-faire* attitude, not wishing to upset any established rules) destroys any inventive, original, innovative options that break with the past: academics, original artists, thinkers and theoreticians are simply invisible. There is the staggering monopoly of the “corps” of France’s senior civil servants (graduates from the country’s elite institutions, such as ENA and Polytechnique); they have a stranglehold on any and every job position, live in pack formations and apply formatted recipes. This is a way of endlessly perpetuating the status quo. Reform is not seen as a prospect for change, for changing the experience of living together as a community, but as a way of adding a shiny veneer to the *de facto* state of affairs. *Laissez-faire* practices always benefit the same parties, serving very short-term interests and destroying land, regions and cultures. Rampant bureaucratic inefficiency, with rules invented to justify the bureaucracy, plays on the fear of unemployment to survive.

A State distinguished by proliferation and inefficiency can only destroy the legitimacy of the function of State, particularly when there is no longer anyone in command, but simply ministers with no forward-looking ideas and a series of interchangeable technocrats in charge of departments.

Yet history has shown us that there are times of change, breaking away from the status quo. The age of the Internet is one such example. It is urgent to invent and to change all parameters, but politics has been reduced to squabbling over figures. But everyday life and lifestyles have changed radically, with physical and digital migration, and compound identities. Surely these too are political issues. Such a situation has seen vast sections of society disengaged from the mainstream and an oligarchy

taking over, with nationalistic and racist groups on one side, plus disengaged communities, disengaging from local self-organisation of other entities. The system may appear to be operating, but is only idling, getting nowhere.

We wish to stress this point as the politicians currently forming the socialist government in power in France epitomise this breakdown; and traditional right-wing politicians are no better (without even venturing to make the comparison with the wheeling and dealing of the Sarkozy years). The global financial crisis is not the problem for today's politicians; in fact, as a source of fear it is to their advantage; the problem is that they appear to have run out of ideological steam. They have been worn down, worn out by the local management required to zigzag between various lobby groups, thinking solely of moving from one job to the next, and of how they can maintain their prerogatives indefinitely while doing nothing: do not rock the boat. In addition, they are surrounded by technocrats of their own ilk who have been worn down by trade unions blocking everything, and who have cynically decided to turn their positions into sinecures. They are devoid of ideas and do not wish to have any; they change nothing and devote most of their efforts to their own careers.

At a time of deep-seated change from one generation to the next, change that has come with new technologies and a visual culture that has transformed the perception of what is real into a permanent state of ubiquity, the groups (who can no longer be referred to as elites given their lack of "culture" of sometimes staggering proportions) are leaders whose sole arguments – alas – are as managers bound up in a monster of inefficient, self-perpetuating bureaucracy. This phenomenon, as exemplified by France in 2014, is clearly a global caricature, and it must be noted that the scourge is not found in many other countries, countries which have maintained genuine drive, albeit with other problems. Knowledge, justice, sustainability?

Prospects do exist therefore, and for a long time now ideas have been put forth and, most importantly, have been debated. There is an abundance of energy; it is found across traditional political groups; it is now on the move, everywhere, even in countries with authoritarian regimes. So what are the divisions of the future?

Local Pride as opposed to retreat and fencing out for reasons of security

The concept of freedom, seen in relation to the emerging concept of public opinion, has become a widespread concern. Freedom was fought for in Europe and North America, and the aspiration is now felt worldwide. The situation is not as clear-cut as may initially be thought, with authoritarian regimes set against democracies. In the past, it was the so-called capitalist countries versus so-called communist countries. The individual plays a central role, and the concept of freedom has spread across all continents, via the Internet and mobile technology, under all political regimes and even in Asian societies shaped by the philosophy of Confucius, and many countries with mixed beliefs and influences.

The issue has become one of democracy of information, and this applies to different types of societies, whether with rigid systems that have been challenged from the inside or elective regimes with no genuine choice – CHOOSE! Media operating in relay have emerged and become a key feature everywhere, helping counter the dominance of a small number of mass media that repeat the same stories from the news market and there are millions of individual contributions and programmes with no impact when in a format other than provocation and entertainment. Information/news is exploited for different purposes, featuring spectacular crime stories, fabricated scandals and corporate PR exercises.

Once we move into this high-media-profile global war, local issues will again become the primary stakes. This is where the fundamental ideological battle of the future will be waged. We are now experiencing ubiquity, extending from our direct perceptions (of what we see around us) to our indirect perceptions (of what we can watch at a distance). All forms of local democracy must therefore be developed. The ultimate Internet tool is the referendum. Advocacy for locally produced goods and services is now reaching a point of balance with flagship innovation projects.

This is indeed the crucial debate. First there are the arguments propounded by the Retros, i.e. those who want to close borders to keep other countries or communities out, basically to build life both present and future on ideas that are the legacy of the past. This is the temptation, and understandably so, of arguments about security and which are particularly effective in ageing societies. It is a great temptation that will not disappear and can even trigger responses in the form of separatism and self-sufficient communities.

Contrary to what is often heard, the alternative approach is not an enthusiastic form of globalism where all citizens are Earthlings who have abandoned any local identity and may even advocate a new form of global nomadic itinerancy. This will only be a minority. The other approach is *Local-Global and Retrofuturo*. It is Local-Global by proclaiming attachment to a local context (“I love where I live!”), but in a system of movement and exchanges via global networks. I am Retro as I can take to the streets as a demonstrator demanding the right to have cheese made from unpasteurised milk; and I am Futuro as a commercial company may distribute packaged food products containing cheese made from unpasteurized milk for inventions devised using other influences such as traditional Asian or Maya cuisine.

A Retro-Futuro identity means being able to choose local connections and include them in an innovative and developing strategy. Every village and city needs to sort and define cultural and economic standards, while also deciding to embark on unexplored paths. The revival of local identity is definitely a fundamental issue involving small circuits in community living and ideas about the circular economy of recycling. It would be a huge strategic error to leave local issues (and local folklore) to conservatives and reactionaries. Any politics or policies (or companies) without local roots will become less attractive.

Reactionary theories exist and have their legitimacy. People are entitled to believe that yesterday is the model for tomorrow and that a fixed, set vision of history based on structured social organisation and set behaviour patterns is the way to find happiness. Such a nostalgic view, both idealised and deliberately passive, has roots in 19th century nationalism, the authoritarian ideologies of liberation and religious sectarianism. The idea is self-protection through repetitive behaviour patterns and the absence of any choice. Reactionary thought (and here I include authoritarian communist models as they allow no scope for pluralism or development) builds on the illusion of security: the choice to surrender individual freedom, subjecting it to pre-established rules, gives the advantage of feeling protected by the group. The modern form of this reactionary approach is found in the prevailing dogma of hygiene, setting up a large global hospital where people do not make choices, but simply comply with a time-based ideal which, with each passing day, brings more restrictions on behaviour. Here is a society of clones.

We like where we live. Once again. Local pride is necessary and should be supported. It is the scorned dimension of societies today, as if the mere mention of things local automatically meant support for reactionary ideas. We have local links and attachments and we need them. This is the indispensable dimension of *cultural ecology* today. Just as everyone can understand how important it is to support biodiversity, so *culturodiversity* too is of vital importance. And this is certainly not an exercise for folklore or nostalgia.

The return to local levels – Local Pride, “I love where I live” – thus comprises a central issue for ideological debates of the future: a reactionary return to the past, or a return turning towards the future (reviving hope: HOPE!). This is the political terrain that needs to be occupied to break down the divide between citizens and the choice for them to live together as a community.

Worldwide federalism based on justice and sustainability

It has to be said that chaos serves the cause of the powerful, serves force, brutality and the amassing of money. The absence of order can parade as sham freedom, as laissez-faire. But a laissez-faire approach has two disadvantages: it perpetuates inequality, or may even make it worse, and it destroys community living conditions.

So the Retros and Futuros are in ideological opposition on a global scale. There are those who settle for time standing still, as their immediate interests are fulfilled, and those who want to see ongoing development of the world, considering it to be both necessary and inevitable. But, as history has often shown, there can be authoritarian ways of seeing change to overall organisation: the Monos have endeavoured to impose a centralised power, an ideology, a religion or, today, an economic empire. This is why a plural view of the world will have to allow scope for communities to live and operate almost self-sufficiently; these communities will not just be groups of monks, for some people will want to move away from mainstream methods of organisation.

Futuros therefore are not all Pluros, to use this terminology as it is simple and universally understood. Freedom, liberty (*Liberterra*) and the defence of diversity (*Multiterra*) form a frontier. It is a challenge to conceive of them and this may also require the acceptance of ways of working or operating that we might object to, doing so in the name of freedom, but in a shared framework agreeing on minimum moral standards. One of the ways of seeing life in the context of a worldwide community is social ecology, expressing a major ideological commitment and covering a number of concerns for justice and to save the planet. The commitment is developing as a global model, combining arguments for developing bodies of knowledge, for experimentation and education, for everything which can help make assessments and choices, moving away from the inhumanity of the dark ages, away from dogma, authoritarian ideologies and laissez-faire practices leading to the amassing and exponential growth of financial assets, and dulling the minds of the masses of consumers reduced to the level of slaves.

Changing perspective to look at a deeper but still general level, the shift in ideology behind the Retros and Futuros can be seen as advocates of productivity versus advocates of social ecology (*productivists Vs social ecologists*). Some militants, hidden behind the conservatism or aspirations of the movement, are calling for a laissez-faire approach in a world of industry with no limits, whereas others wish to serve the environment and social justice, enlightened by knowledge and the quest for knowledge.

Opposition to global laissez-faire then means the wish to have global organisational structures. Federalism alone has proven it can have the flexibility and ability to embrace the characteristics that distinguish our modern age, with different identities intertwined across levels and contexts (local, regional, national, continental and global). General rules will have to be developed for behaviour, with local variations adopted to cater for differences and specific features.

Such a tolerant view of a planet marked by relativity will no doubt deal with progression and will even, as suggested by Elisée Reclus, allow for regression. At different locations, different types of experimentation will be conducted, and the criteria for their assessment will have to go beyond simple monetary considerations. (Does the term “income” have the same meaning in New York as in the Laotian rainforest?) This is where socialism too must be replenished and go back to its roots, to old forms of social organisation that emerged in the 19th century (e.g. cooperatives, mutual funds and movements and direct consultation of local communities).

Socialism will thus be able to offer original approaches for an ethical economy that is so sorely needed. Since 1973, for forty and more years now, my generation has been hearing about the Crisis. Crisis – big deal! There has been no moral crisis, or behavioural crisis, or crisis affecting the organisation of society, or values; no, just a financial crisis affecting the economy; in fact, a crisis affecting a certain type of economy which has revealed its flaws and caused environmental suicide with addictive over-consumption that has failed to provide individuals with a sense of satisfaction. Instead of tackling the two key issues, the same old recipes are used: down with unemployment, up with growth and on with progress. It is time to release the hot air from these over-inflated balloons.

Yes to work, but with what corporate scale of salaries and wages? What ethics, both in-house and externally? What consideration will there be for working conditions and job satisfaction, and for career prospects in an efficient administration giving recognition and motivation to staff and without immovable upper echelons of senior directors? What developments can there be towards “à la carte” retirement plans involving different generations? What balance, rather than antagonism, can be found between work and leisure in a world-wide context?

There must be growth, but not under conditions tantamount to environmental suicide (e.g. with fishermen depleting the resources), and it cannot be the same for New Yorkers as it is for the Wayana people or the locals in Limoges: this means diversified growth venturing beyond the scope of a chartered accountant, i.e. discussions and exchanges free of charge, generating capital gains but on human and cultural assets, producing diversified social psychology.

Such progress is not the realisation that it is better to live with a refrigerator than without, but recognition of the need for development, movement, experimentation and change. Political parties and movements advocating in-depth reform (either right or left), and that have the courage to focus on justice, sustainability and knowledge as clear targets will be in a position to revive hope throughout society and set goals again.

Multiterra, a planet of relativity with multiple models accepting change

Diversity as an argument is a strong philosophical concept reaching beyond common terms and definitions. The genuine combat waged between multiple and single, between Pluro and Mono, has proven to be challenging. It may, for example, be opposition to eugenics, to the selection of allegedly superior human beings on the grounds that a child must not be chosen (except in the event of serious problems). It may be the idea of a planet where Parisians do not see themselves as more “civilised” than African nomads living in the bush and believing in spirits. It may be the choice of very diverse societies with a wide variety of elements, that may occasionally be despicable. Culturodiversity, as is the case for biodiversity, brings both sheep and spiders.

This is the point where diversification reproduces and multiplies. Individuation will tend to shatter blocks, breaking apart masses and producing numerous combined personalities. Each one is and will be a compound, with identities embedded yet defying attempts at classification. (A person may be from the city of Carpentras, enjoy Japanese cuisine, be Jewish, live with a partner out of wedlock, be an expert on Sufi philosophy, love boxing and films by Eric Rohmer, and be fascinated by Mali, doing all that while pottering around the garden in Carpentras). The Internet thus stands out as the vector of possibilities, of choice and of individuation.

These new personalities may, however, embark on one of a number of very different paths, perhaps self-destruction, hatred, murder and terrorism. It must be said that being Pluro brings the potential for being abject and dangerous. Two virtues of scientific and political ecology are needed here to help shape individual behaviour: non-violence and respect for the environmental common good.

The rejection of violence is a wise stance that has arisen over millennia of dramatic experiences. While societies obviously need to protect themselves (worldwide policing on the basis of shared moral standards), the use of violence to spread ideology has always been horrifically self-defeating. Ecology, however, comes with a great paradox, and it is probably no random association. In my experience as an advocate of cultural ecology, I have endeavoured to give it a broad definition, covering relationships between human beings and the environment in a long-term perspective, plus the philosophical, scientific, economic, political and cultural consequences. But in public discussion and debate, particularly

in France, it has come to mean a narrow form of caricature, with political in-fighting and appealing only to a clan of yuppies. This is absurd.

Who is affected by pollution, junk food, environmental scandals, and anomalous weather events? The masses, and in particular the poorest. Ecology concerns everyone; it is a key challenge for future existence as a community and for social justice. If ecology is seen outside the scope of everyday life, community living and common values, then half of its impact is overlooked. Ecology – the ecology – is both physical and cultural. It is time to be seen and grasp all these questions to prepare and build societies we want rather than having societies imposed on us. CHOOSE is the movement.

An age of philosophical relativity can therefore be built on an attitude of tolerance to lifestyles and visions of the world. Instead of enforcing standard opinions for all, for gregarious or hygiene-based consumerism, instead of pursuing Promethean dreams of stopping history and conquering the planet, there are other options: scientific methods for continuing development, research, questioning, a number of solutions. These are the only options that can be sustainable and gain general approval in the dimension that is needed, i.e. the level of local-global dialogue. These options are a function of their immediate environments and of decisions that must be made and will involve the future of the broader community. This approach does not only express humanism, but also addresses the environment and development.

These are the real issues which concern us all. These are the issues which should be dealt with by political parties, tolerant religious leaders and the media. It is now essential for us to tackle major changes and developments so as to avoid having behaviour patterns imposed, to avoid being manipulated for ulterior motives and to avoid sham debates and smokescreens. At a time of widespread environmental perils, terrorism has now been invented, just as the Cold War was invented in the past, for the purpose of keeping people in line, keeping them under surveillance. Faced with programmed mindlessness and in a climate of fear kindled by scenes of gore in the media, we need to understand. In doing so we need to set targets and landmarks. Let us therefore clearly outline our interests in the world today, for the adventure on the planet earth must be revived, continually, again and again: *Plurofuturos versus Monoretros*. Multiterra or Monoterra? HOPE! CHOOSE!



*Who is Laurent Gervereau, **Mister Local-Global** (a nickname that appeared in the English-speaking world in 2010)? Here is a range of biographies.*

*If you do not find one that suits you, feel free to **send in others**. “Philosopher; writer; artist, film-maker; historian of visual works, museologist and director of heritage institutions, everyday life activist, French citizen and traveller via empathy. Laurent Gervereau has done everything to be indefinable, and what’s more has managed perfectly to do so.”*

(Reference, Radio Hong Kong, November 2012)



1956 was the year, so it seems, of the birth of an individual who was promptly named Laurent, Louis, Jean Gervereau. Forceps were used to extract the amorphous mass. It was a tough start, but he probably gained a propensity for taking on ambitious projects (and he did end up being a beautiful baby) despite great difficulties and widespread incomprehension. No belief in destiny or fate; it was a forceps birth for a forceps life. On the other hand, surely this is the lot in life of all those who refuse to accept what they consider to be unacceptable, who will not settle for merely enjoying the pleasures of existence, but endeavour to influence their era and wish to leave a mark.

He was born in the comfortable middle-class suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine to the west of Paris, but spent his childhood in the working-class suburb to the north, in Bobigny. Brothers and sisters came after him. The more there were, the more he felt unusual and alone. He would get up at night when he heard the sirens between the factory shifts; he would gaze at the factory lights in the distance. Home was in the avenue Henri Barbusse, and he could walk to the local school (Paul Langevin), going past small individual houses, rabbit hutches and market gardens. The entire district has now been demolished and high rise has taken over. As the amiable eldest child in the family, there was nothing to complain about, but he reacted violently to any injustice; never, at any stage in his life, has he been able to turn a blind eye, but has expressed outrage, most of the time to no effect, when faced with a two-tiered (or three- or more-tiered) society, or a legal system speaking a language devoid of common sense, when faced with words not matched by actions, when speeches are proclaimed but not expressed in the actions of the speakers in their daily life: being in the world is a whole.

At the local school, and as a child from a middle-class background, he wanted to learn languages; his foreign language here was Balbynian slang (Balbynian being the adjective for the district of Bobigny).

He learnt about the violence of human relationships and social differences. Children would call him a Chinetoque (slang for Chinese, a Chink). He felt increasingly isolated. This violent challenge helped him develop a sense of relativity.

He was good at schoolwork and skipped a class. The boys' school was to the right, and the girls' school to the left, and never the twain shall meet. He liked disguises, pretending to be characters, empathising with one and then another, dreaming of multiple lives.



He discovered that the world was not the same but depended on the way of seeing it. The realisation came through family warfare on political and religious subjects: the Catholics supporting the reactionary Charles Maurras versus the pro-de Gaulle Protestants. He was raised a Protestant, but for him the Bible was to be read as if it were Greek mythology, fairy tales or legends; it was fascinating to see such flights of fancy. He does not believe in God, or any form of higher being, and is greatly attached to the rational and experimental approach of science (and the science of imaginary solutions). But throughout his life he clearly shows the influence of Calvinist thought, and of the history of the Protestants (specifically the Bost family), massacred under Louis XIV, of resistants and migrants; this has influenced both the structuring of his philosophical options and his ethical choices.

On the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, he dislocated his hip. There were many major operations. Schoolmates at Drancy high school would trip him up just to laugh at the guy with the limp lagging behind. Feelings of hate for mankind in general and the school system in particular.

Moved to Versailles, repeated the year at school and discovered May 68 in the Citroën 2CV of his young English teacher (a woman). Suffering from a lack of affection, he channelled his fierce energy into original creative work. Ventured into the world of cartoons and comic books; discovered literature and essays; explored and absorbed all sorts of music and pictures (pop, jazz, Skryabin, Pygmies etc.); soaked up black & white television; developed a passion for the visual arts. Played rugby, wrote, painted, became a movie buff/addict and enthusiastic visitor of museums. Overflowing with appetites, always beyond any standard format.

After miraculously getting the baccalaureate with a science major, he trailed around the Institute of Political Science in Paris, changed to Law and then the Ecole du Louvre, before ultimately dropping out of everything, including the smothering family environment, and went to live with a charming young lady (with a renewable lease on his/her affections for an extended period), living in a garret, doing miscellaneous jobs (selling newspapers and books, working in a bank). From 1976 to 1979 he published a pataphysico-situationist periodical: *Aux poubelles de la Gloire* [In the Trashcans of Glory] and, in addition to visual work, wrote “Défaut d’identité” [Identity Flaw], the first part of the long novel *L’Homme planétaire* (homo planetarus), followed by “Où suis-je ?” [Where am I?] written in the 1980s and 1990s and published in 2001, by Sens & Tonka, as *Ce livre n’est pas à lire* [This Book Is Not For Reading]; the third part, “Mixplanet”, was written in 2002 and adapted as a comic book with the Chinese artist Xin Ye in 2011. In 1975 he contemplated the possibility of migrating to Australia, to the south-west to escape the nuclear and technocratic folly of France under President Giscard d’Estaing. This was the time of his awakening as an ecologist, and the beginning of his aversion to blinkered bureaucratic reasoning (that destroys freedom and is self-perpetuating). He does not have a single label for himself as a humanist (indeed, he can easily become misanthropic, cursing self-destructive human idiocy), but sees himself as a terraphile, a term he coined in the mid-1970s, meaning an advocate of diversity for human beings *with* their terrestrial environment, in a context of conservation and ongoing change.

Throughout his life he has chosen rationality, basic scientific reasoning in combination with the acceptance and promotion of elements irrational, intuitive and imaginative, doing so in the name of scientific rationality. Very early he experienced existential doubts: rejecting the concept of progress, preferring movement; rejecting happiness, preferring the quest for pleasure, either individually or as a group; rejecting artificial growth or development, preferring adaptation, for change evolving in

Retrofuturo environmental harmony; rejecting belief in an ideal, preferring the building of ethics, ethics for everyday life, constantly questioned and reviewed, covering individual and group behaviour patterns, here and everywhere. Basically it was thought founded on relativity, backed by experimentation and the never-ending quest for knowledge. Here was ontological curiosity in a critical frame of mind, countering both relativism (pessimism to justify any and every attitude) and the movement to stop change or evolution, with dogma and societies deliberately closed to the outside world.

He managed not to belong to any party, while being close to situationist and libertarian groups. On the basis of the philosophy of relativity and support for diversity, he did not call for revolution (to achieve a perfect society, the very principle of which is dangerous), or any tabula rasa, or violence, but advocated steadily evolving change, the fight for justice and protection of the environment (improving it), for tolerance, combining a selection of elements from the past and innovations moving towards a future with the intention of it being in perpetual movement. He had understood relativity very early in life. Quote from a rediscovered text dated 1974 (featuring the pompous style often preferred in youth): “Do not wait for the grand night or the early hours of the morning. Our circumstances and our luck have us acting *hic et nunc* and experiencing (fulfilling the senses and discovering) in situations imposed while endeavouring to have them change. Thus relativity consists of accepting contingencies and uncertainty, while wishing, through will and strategy in an endless quest for insight, to build new realities desired (with no deadline other than our own death).”

He has only ever been a member of an organisation once in his life (in early 1970): the Collège de 'Pataphysique, following illustrious forbears such as Queneau, Peillet, Ionesco, Dubuffet, Duchamp, Miro, Max Ernst, Paul-Emile Victor and Boris Vian. He was a friend of the president of OULIPO (*Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*) and his wife Eva, and has always maintained a wild affinity for independent thinking, no doubt the seed sowing the Plurofuturo approach, advocating diversity with an aspiration to perpetual change (through demanding drive and the quest for pleasure); and there is his categorical refusal to act as a guru, to establish any type of sect, thus producing more and more ideas and being more active in a range of fields. Moving through different stages, he developed the component parts of a view of the world, an apparently productive one, and it has been the same view ever since his teenage years, displaying great continuity and expanding with thoughts and experimentation at every different moment of his journey along the path, and with changes affecting the planet.



He then embarked on a strange exercise. As a teenager he had developed a broad view of the world (his libertarian *Weltanschauung*, in reaction against his family background), but he was to achieve a highly specialised focus, as an expert on political posters in a history museum, before gradually extending the scope of his work to include the study of images, media, the philosophy of relativity and social ecology. On October 1, 1978, he started work, with a short-term contract, replacing a friend in a museum with art and history collection, the Museum of the Two World Wars [Musée des Deux Guerres mondiales] in the Hôtel des Invalides in Paris, in a position that came under the Ministry of Education.

After being the replacement assistant librarian, he worked there as security guard and then as a storeman; he needed to keep a position. He ended up devoting great efforts and energy to the museum, holding some forty exhibitions over a period of 23 years and writing texts analysing every possible type of visual expression. He had the museum renamed: Le Musée d'histoire contemporaine [the Museum of Contemporary History]. Many of the initiatives have left a lasting legacy; this was pioneering work. Extensive catalogues stand as records; for example: *De La Propagande sous Vichy*, *La France en guerre d'Algérie*, the history of immigration, *Images & Colonies*, the year 1917 in the world, the history of television, Utopias and science fiction, the history of political posters, cartoons in the press, deportation and the Nazi concentration system, the Sixties in France and Great Britain, May/June 1968, the history of the area of Yugoslavia, the history of Russia and the USSR. Many were memorable, sometimes gaining such recognition retrospectively. Gervereau, while a loner by nature, showed clear talent for joint ventures and a genuine ability for devising work projects for networking, and with a minimal budget. He is an advocate of value added for the State. His personal career path had taken him from positions as museum guard and storeman to the very top of the hierarchy, to the position of director of conservation, a rare achievement.

And there were two wonderful children: Antoine in 1984 (Orwell's year) and Pauline in 1987 (for the anniversary of the Russian Revolutions). There was enough anxiety to keep him working, working a great deal: publishing books in his own name, while also doing a higher degree at the EHSS [Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales], for it should be noted that he was living in a country obsessed with degrees and official papers, albeit with scant interest in the work actually done.



In 1989, he set up (in hindsight it can be said with prescience) a poster-journal on painters of history, *Les Peintres d'histoire*, (with Louis Rollinde, Guy Bodson, Jean-Hugues Berrou, Gilles Ghez and Sinono), calling for politics and intimacy to be brought back into the realm of art. In all there were three public events (at the Institut français in Naples plus the Galerie Gabert in Paris in 1994, and Kubus in Hanover in 1996). Starting in 1989 he launched the series of visual works entitled *téléphages*. This came after *varia* from very early days (1969-1973), the *apparitions* of the 1970s (black and white relief work, papers and paintings), the colour *cadrages* [framings] of the 1980s, and came before *occultations*, masked works recreating rarity by impeding sight at a time when there was a boom in images. Thus he advocated both multimedia activism by original creative artists and dissemination (Résistance des savoirs [Resistance of knowledge]/Knowledge is Beautiful), while also producing single (*Unik*) pieces that were rare and difficult to see: *La Disparition des images* [The Disappearance of Images], Somogy, 2003, and the catalogue of original works rediscovered (1969-2014) published on the Website www.gervereau.com.

In 1991, he became curator of the Contemporary History Museum (Musée d'histoire contemporaine). He founded the International Association of History Museums (Association internationale des musées d'histoire), holding the position of president for thirteen years; he was conscious of the future importance of multimedia and polysemic institutions. In 1992, he launched the Study Group devoted to still pictures. (The term “image fixe” at the time was both unknown and incongruous, but would soon take off.) The group subsequently became *L'Image* then the *Institut des Images*, and asserting the need for bridges to be built between disciplines and formats, between research and conservation institutions, between countries; and there was the need to provide references or benchmarks for the younger generation as well as the mainstream public. Loyal friends were involved in *L'Image* (Christian Delporte, Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, Fabrice d'Almeida, Antoine de Baecque, Philippe Buton, David El Kenz, Serge Guilbaut and others), plus many writers from different fields, both in France and internationally. For twenty years he worked steadily and stubbornly, often to the mystification of all around, attracting ridicule or surreptitious looting. Internationally, he worked on the art of decoding and deciphering all types of images; (see his textbook on the method: *Voir, comprendre, analyser les images* [See, understand and analyse images] published by La Découverte and reprinted many times); an essential point was to take into account the overall background history of visual works produced by humans: Visual History or Histiconologia. Thus he stressed the need for general benchmarks, observing both the inaccuracies arising through iconological approaches excluding formats considered to be less noble, or semiological approaches with total disregard for attempts at contextualisation, producing brilliant but totally anachronistic analyses. All of this only added further mental confusion to the prevailing material confusion at a time of rampant and random accumulation of images. He developed in parallel, and intentionally so, a distribution policy as part of his professional practice, with a gratis economy, using donations and generosity.

1998 saw the beginning of a campaign to found a history museum devoted to the 20th century, with support from leading French and international historians from across the political spectrum, operating with a prestigious committee chaired by Jacques Julliard. The plan ended up being relegated to the limbo of projects that have never made it through the ministerial hurdles.

He published the bilingual periodical *L'Image*, distributed in France by Gallimard and in the United States by Harvard: he launched stock-taking seminars: *Où va l'histoire de l'art contemporain ?* [Where is the history of contemporary art going?] (with Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, Gérard Monnier

and Serge Guilbaut) and *Peut-on apprendre à voir ?* [Can seeing be learnt/taught?] (at the Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, directed by Yves Michaud and then Alfred Pacquement). The proceedings were published jointly with the School which distributed them.



In 1999, he set up a European Council of History Museums, with support from the European Commission for a four-year period with EUROCLIO, a Website featuring a module devoted to European history through images, as well as exhibitions and a range of travelling events (e.g. “Your history is our history” and “Everyone is a foreigner somewhere”), plus a prestigious journal of comparative history, *Comparare*, with names such as Eric Hobsbawm, Jacques Le Goff, Bronislaw Geremek, Rudolf von Thadden and Carlo Ginzburg. He set up the French council of history museums [*Conseil français des musées d’histoire*] after publishing the first guide to historic sites and museums in France together with Marie-Hélène Joly. In Turin in 2000, he became president of the network of museums of Europe which was a convivial, informal club of various institutions coming together for prospective critical study and discussion of concrete cases of museums in Europe.

He published *Les Images qui mentent* [Images that lie] (Seuil, then in a longer revised version in paperback as *Histoire du visuel au XXe siècle*) and produced *Un siècle de manipulations par l’image*, an exhibition on a century of manipulation through images and also as a book (soon out of print). For young readers he teamed up with the cartoonist Cabu for *Le monde des images – Comprendre les images pour ne pas se faire manipuler* [The world of pictures – Understanding pictures so as not to be manipulated] (Robert Laffont, 2004).

He was pleased to contribute to a number of art exhibitions (*Face à l'histoire* at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, *La Planète Jorn* at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Strasbourg, *Picasso et la caricature* at the Picasso Museum in Barcelona and *Topor* in Naples and Lisbon). He wrote books: *Critique de l'image quotidienne – Asger Jorn* published by Cercle d'art and *(presque) tout Topor* published by Alternatives.

His novel/essay *Ce livre n'est pas à lire* [This book is not for reading] (Sens & Tonka) was selected as one of the feature novels of the 2001 season by the magazine *Les Inrockuptibles* and the radio station *France Culture*. Opposing all forms of marketing-oriented writing, he has defended the legitimacy of relative writing, of Net-writing combining styles and genres (for both video and written works) and stands as a pioneer of genuinely global world-literature in multimedia forms – cross-medialism.



In 2001 he took up the position of director of the Henri Langlois Cinema Museum, met hundreds of people around the world, set up a cultural plan accepted by all concerned, but ended up being dismissed (redundancy on economic grounds) in 2002 on the appointment of the new Minister of Culture who wanted to drop the project. This had no impact on his passionate interest in the cinema and he set up the Moving Images Exhibitions Network (MIEN).

During this period of unemployment, he discovered the closed caste system prevailing in cultural circles in France. He put the time to good use, writing CD-roms (*Décrypter le visuel*), setting up Websites

with an educational approach (www.imagesmag.net; www.imageduc.net; www.primages.net) and launching the European Media Barometer with support from the European Commission (2003); this later provided the basis for the book *Inventer l'actualité – La construction imaginaire du monde par les médias internationaux* [Inventing News – The imaginary construction of the world by the international media] (La Découverte, 2004), a prophetic critique of news circuits and the effects of the advent of new media.

In January 2004, even though in the difficult situation of being unemployed and without unemployment benefits, he decided to resign as president of the International Association of History Museums so as not to end up as president-potentate for life. Appalled by the extent of human folly, he continued along his path, sweeping aside stupidity and mediocrity, thanking a few loyal friends, and using the time for original creative work and for developing ideas.



In March 2004 he was appointed director of the “Agro” libraries (for agronomic research), and in 2005, with support from the directors, he launched the museum of living beings (Musée du Vivant), the first international museum devoted to ecology and sustainable development. Here he adopted the gratis economy, with exchanges and donations as standard practice (e.g. donating books and documents, work and knowledge, exhibitions and films), based on generosity and non-monetary values. In Turin in 2005, he was again elected President of the Network of European Museums. In late 2006, in New Zealand, he launched the Ecology and Sustainable Network (UNESCO-ICOM) and in France, a network for heritage of living beings and ecology, the *Réseau patrimoine du vivant et écologie*.

He was joint editor/author of a book on the invisible collections of paintings at the Palace of Versailles [*Le Musée révélé: L'histoire de France au château de Versailles*], and played an active role in the scientific committee responsible for the museum/palace, as well as in similar bodies in France and internationally (e.g. as consultant to South African museums and, in 2004, mounting the world congress in Sao Paulo and Rio on the subject of organisation in a multipolar world). In 2006, his book *Vous avez dit musées ? Tout savoir sur la crise culturelle* [Did you say museums? Everything you need to know about the crisis in culture] was published by the CNRS (Editions du CNRS). The book sees the sometimes difficult change and adjustment of heritage institutions, with their new roles and their concerns converging through multidisciplinary approaches. In 2008 he chose to take on the curatorship of a photography exhibition on Europe at the French Senate, with the Alinari Fondation based in Florence. In 2009 it was the confrontation of painting and photography in *La Guerre sans dentelles* [The war without lace] in the Gallery of Battles at the Palace of Versailles. He became a member of the scientific committee of the Shoah Foundation in Paris (*Fondation pour la mémoire de la Shoah*), at the request of Simone Veil for whom he has great respect and whose term on the committee ended at the same time as his; he set aside his objection to the term “shoah” which he considers to be an anachronism). In 1995, Simone Veil had officially opened the exhibition *La déportation, le système concentrationnaire nazi* which he had produced jointly with François Bédarida and which was the first time the subject had been featured with half the presentation by German specialists and half by French specialists. He has always been wary of any form of exploitation or manipulation, advocating proper work founded on history.

With the *Institut des Images*, where he also held the position of president, he jointly organised a symposium on the role of images in history (April 2006) and had a successful publication with the *Dictionnaire mondial des Images*, a global dictionary of images featuring contributions from every continent, from more than 300 specialists (for 275 finally included). Pursuing this path, he asserted the need for a general history of visual expression, and one that would include a specific history of art; he presented this in *Images, une histoire mondiale* [Images, a global history] (Nouveau monde/CNDP, 2008). In March 2009, with the confederation of French educational associations, the Ligue de l'Enseignement, he launched an international portal for education on images: www.decrypt-images.net. The site became the venue for a free exhibition in Septembre 2011, and a book was also published: *Les images mentent ? Manipuler les images ou manipuler le public* [Do pictures lie? Manipulating images or manipulating the public]. This triggered interest in his books outside France:

Voir, comprendre, analyser les images was translated into Portuguese and distributed in Brazil, and an Arabic version was produced by a publishing house in Lebanon; *Images, une histoire mondiale* was translated into Arabic by the University of Cairo. His theories were taken up in Canada and even spread to China where he was asked to visit. The history of visual expression spread internationally as the concept of global history developed; but he had one proviso which was for a stratified form of history; he was critical of the Visual Studies trend in the United States which only too often disregards the background context of the images when produced, thus giving rise to confusion and misinterpretations.



After *Montrer la guerre ? Information ou propagande* [Showing war? News or Propaganda] (Isthmes, 2005), he continued writing analyses of the media: *La Guerre mondiale médiatique* [The Media World War] (2007). Standing up to the trend of anti-culture dumbing down that came with the decline of the television business, he called for resistance through knowledge: *Résistance des savoirs*. He made a film on the fear of images, *La Peur des images*, and worked on his major novel, *L'Homme planétaire*. He completed his essay arguing for a philosophy of relativity, *Pour une philosophie de la relativité*, advocating relativity as opposed to relativism, with the idea of identities interlinked at the individual level and the need for differentiated development in a worldwide context. In late 2007, he published his critical work studying depictions of nature and ecology since the 16th century (*D'après nature. Science et fantasmes depuis le XVIe siècle*), with a special focus on the concept of cultural ecology; and he launched on-line television (ecolibtv) and documentary films (on subjects such as biodiversity, water, trees, climate and food).

Ever since his first theoretical texts published in the 1970s (e.g. the periodical *Aux poubelles de la Gloire* [In the Trashcans of Glory]) and all the way through to the express philosophy of Moving Signs, Gervereau has endeavoured to invent and disseminate concepts, adopting positions diametrically opposed to the fashion which consists of blindly repeating the same idea as mere variations on a theme then diluting it in the form of an image. He has also been outspoken against speeches and books that are nothing more than compilations of quotations. He has no time for the so-called philosophical exercise which, instead of tackling ideas as directly stated, hides behind the statements of others; compulsive quoting is probably more an ambition to keep the reader/viewer at a distance and a bid to reach the heights of august figures of earlier times. While debts and influences are to be acknowledged, an idea must be judged basically on its own operational worth, even when only brief and bare. We need thinker/players who test such ideas on an everyday basis, combining both theory and practice, building a line of action based on a chosen ethical stance and the local-global ambition of seeing both the human and material environment evolving through change.

This ambition to be a thinker in words, practice and theory, to be open and productive, can be illustrated with some examples. In 2007, Laurent Gervereau took on the presidency of the scientific committee of the institute for literary (and artistic) lunatics, *Institut sur les fous littéraires (et artistiques)*, and resigned after launching the special day, April 1, 2009, at the French National Library, coming up against a sectarian response from some people. He felt a strong need to combat the move to standardisation that was under way, the common denominator and functional approaches, slickly presented pre-packaged ideas for sale, in a vast global hospital where you will seek treatment but will not think; the world is a dangerous place, so stay at home; everything has been done, so do not imagine anything else. This was the context when he agreed to take on a major event run as a network (Rhine-Rhone) over a full year, linking sixteen cities in France, Switzerland and Germany in 2010: Utopias & Innovations (including exhibitions, street performances, concerts and films on-line). For the same project he made five feature films, defending *cinema espresso* (see further details on films) by extending an invitation for a new Nouvelle vague (nouvelle Nouvelle vague) with films produced using digital technology and the Web, therefore with scope for a range of experimental forms of expression, as had been the case with the previous Nouvelle vague when cameras reached new levels of mobility, bringing innovation at a time when television was the revolution.

The latter part of 2010 was a productive period, with five books in September (literature, philosophy and politics), then December in Belfort organising the first retrospective of the five feature films of his *cinema espresso*. They were screened throughout 2010 (Arc, Senans, Dijon, Yverdon, Neuchâtel and Le Creusot) and the commercial release was in January 2011, beginning with *L'info est-elle comestible ?* [Is news edible?] at the Reflet Médecis cinema in Paris, opening on January 12. The films were shown (including the screening at the opening of the international festival of audiovisual programmes, FIPA, in Biarritz in January 2011). In all he has made eight feature films, presenting views of his environment on planet earth, addressing local-global questions, and self-fiction works, in consciously diverse forms.

He travelled across the continents for conferences and as adviser to heritage institutions; on returning from the tropical rainforest in Guyana, he wrote another book, *Vers une écologie culturelle* [Towards cultural ecology] focusing on differential development, relative progress and stories and histories with ramifications. He had rejected the concept of cultural exception and advocated cultural diversity, stressing the importance of diversifying diversity, which requires individual choice and change as opposed to initiatives simply to conserve set traditional community cultures as separate entities. He accepted the position of Vice-President of the René Dumont Foundation, being a great admirer of such an independent visionary (and feeling genuine affection for Charlotte Paquet-Dumont), while also advocating critical ecology. In January 2009, in the midst of a financial crisis that was also a crisis with an impact on models, he published his penetrating, prospective essay on interlinked identities, *Un monde micro-macro, Penser l'ubiquité et la disparité* [A micro-macro world; thoughts on ubiquity and disparity]. In early 2010, he produced the last in the series of works, *Renverser le monde* [Turning the world upside down], inviting readers to have points of view not centred on the Western world and to find practices for the economy and for everyday life by switching perspectives and showing respect for all practices. With input from work done in Laos and Mongolia (and also through his trips to Japan, Mali and India), he outlined new network attitudes of viewer/players (going beyond performance society in the age of television), for singular-plural individuals. At the same time he carried out an anti-tourism photography project in Mongolia. And in 2011, he wrote a general history of ecology in pictures, from prehistoric times to the present day, *Une histoire générale de l'écologie en images, de la préhistoire à nos jours*, taking the concept of ecology and placing it back in a longer and demanding perspective (and widely distributed as both a virtual on-line exhibition and a printed book).

During the summer of 2011, he completed *Halte aux voleurs d'avenir !* [Stop the thieves stealing the future!], with a preface by Willem and an afterword by André Stas, as a brief review of ideas designed to keep the world on the move, to combat resignation and the theft of the future; this initiated the business of a new (but short-lived) on-line publishing house launched by a young collective: www.fauteuiltronik.com. He considered that the only choice was to go back to the local level in a bid to shake up the world, the concern being to have a model for original creative work and knowledge, for justice and environmental sustainability in a plurofuturo aspiration, being plural and changing.

Continuing in 2011, he designed a Web exhibition free of charge on www.decryptimages.net: *Les images mentent ? Manipuler les images ou manipuler le public* [Do images lie? Manipulating images or manipulating the audience]. He also attempted to stir minds to save the upcoming presidential elections in France from being an exercise in futility, to have people open their eyes to see changes in the world by reappraising the role of knowledge and original creative art in society. At the same time he finished editing the film *En attendant l'hiver... Climat et vie quotidienne chez les Inuit* [Waiting for winter: the Inuit people, their climate and everyday life] (shot in Nunavik in November/December 2010 and endorsed by the Inuits and the people of Quebec). He also completed *POLITICALLY INKORECT!* (Noël Arnaud and Dada, Jarry, Picasso, Jorn, Duchamp, Debord, Vian, Oulipo and more) and a preview screening was given at the opening of the exhibition on Guy Debord at the French National Library in April 2013. Together with Christian Delporte, he organised a global conference on the heritage of ecology and the ecology of heritage designed to have an impact on the way such institutions operate; the book of the same title was also published.



**Provisional Conclusion:
make sense, stick to your arguments,
invent, experiment and experience**

We shall endeavour to give a brief description of this hyperactive being (while he still is), such energy no doubt coming from angst, but also from an appetite for life, and a lifelong awareness of the human condition being, fortunately yet distressingly, ephemeral.

Working scientifically, he has sought to break down barriers no longer meaningful in the age of the Internet. He first invented an indispensable general history of visual expression, histiconologia or histiconologia, developed in many books and on a Website, www.decryptimages.net. Then came methods for analysing images, plus seminars, a bilingual journal, DVDs, petitions to have the school curriculum include courses on learning to see along with learning to read, and he has worked indefatigably for more than thirty years now. He realises that all this will naturally prevail, but, looking beyond well-intentioned promises that get nowhere, there is the cumbersome and outdated system plus institutional forces of conservatism that stand as obstacles to transformations that will inevitably occur on a planet undergoing major cultural change.

His atypical position, in a history museum with a diversity of collections, grappling with the key issues of the 20th century, has naturally led to investigations into the knowledge or science of history. Through the International Association of History Museums, founded in 1991, and as President of it for fourteen years, before choosing to step down after such long and faithful service, he questioned and led genuine practical challenges through the exhibitions and international meetings he organised. He strongly supported comparativism, the comparative approach to history, seeing the strata of history extending from local to global, while also asserting the need for new references to counter widespread confusion and the related risks. He has been a virulent critic (a sometimes lonely role to play) of the fad for memory and remembrance which is a way of exploiting and manipulating history; for memories exist in the plural and by their very nature are a challenge to rational thinking, therefore and thereby being an additional source of division in society, producing any number of sectarian groups.

Standing up against the much vaunted duty of remembrance, he sees a need for history; this is a critical and mobile approach and the only one able to bring the different peoples together over the past in question. He also considers, and once again is alone in this position, that the reactionary stranglehold on French television is unacceptable when the public service is seeking to boost audience figures by glorifying kings and palaces. In no way does he advocate a history of the people as opposed to a history of the leaders, i.e. with one ideology replacing another, but rather an overall history of societies taking both people and leaders into account and not overlooking disparities at a local level (life in Xaintrie in the 17th century was far removed from life in Versailles, just as life in the palace is nothing like life around the palace). He also rejects what is known as the national novel, the infamous patriotic tale invented in the 19th century to help unite the nation but which has no relevance today, merely standing as a moment in the long time span of the country; any attempt to hang onto it as if to some paradise lost in a world of nostalgia is simply pathetic, comparable to the myth of the little village united around the church steeple in the age of urban development and industrialisation. This is a typical feature of mindless thought, incapable of embracing the entire past of the country to build and develop a shared local-global proposal combining elements that are legitimate sources of local pride and expressions of the global solidarity and empathy needed today. Gervereau also considers that it is absurd to make history a closed book, to overlook influences, movements, contacts and trade (inside and outside Europe): refuse the history of the powerful, refuse narrow-minded history.

On the level of ideas, through the philosophy of relativity, he has advocated a line of thinking that breaks with 20th century classifications now meaningless in a world where diversity must be promoted and extended through revitalization, through individuals networking, through movement, imagination and change. In the age of ubiquity, he has developed theories on the basis of our interlinked identities, for we live between our direct perceptions, directly visible phenomena, and our remote perceptions. This is not a globalised planet, no set ideal; time is not standing still, there is no uniform standardisation; it is an Earth that is relative being both linked and moving apart (with diversified economies and cultures), overturning concepts of work and leisure, emphasising equity in work, ethical corporations and efficient public administration, with new active and sustainable consumer patterns, with new consumer-players: *Ici et partout. Trois essais d'écologie culturelle* [Here and everywhere – Three essays on cultural ecology].

For his original art (visual art, films, novels and plays), he has pursued work involving innovation, imagination and margins, with interlinked written forms (Net-writing, frontier-films and *cinema espresso*), going against the negative forces of ego-history and marketing-thought. He has moved back and forth between different formats (e.g. video and painting, writing and the Web), distributing and broadcasting independently (images, prints, books and films), seeking demanding standards and rarity (original – Unik –works of visual art) as opposed to the random dumping of anything and everything for passive consumerism with no reference values. On October 19, 2013, he launched his local-global mini-videos, *artkronik*, on Dailymotion, combining expressions of moods, humour, visual scribbles on paper, image remnants, sometimes music, ready-made songs and more. In July 2014, he began working on them in his studio in Xaintrie, on large canvases (2 square metres or more) together with short videos: alternative news, trifling responses to the media overkill targeting us. A catalogue raisonné of works dating back to 1969 was put on-line on www.gervereau.com and published in printed form (2014).

For his art work too he has adopted his English nickname, first given to him in 2010: Mister Local-Global. This was the name for his musical adventure *MusiK BotaniK* produced in 2014-2015 with Stan Refet, Vincent Pateau together with Catherine Le Forestier, Areski, Michel Dintrich, Yann Molenat.

Then there is politics. In 2010, seeing the collateral damage of a society cornered and run as an oligarchy – French necrosis in both theory and practice – he agreed to defend the cause of the socio-ecolo-evolutionists (SEE, www.see-socioecolo.com), initiated in Brazil and Canada. Here are Plurofuturos who want to reinvent their experimental existence through expressions of solidarity worldwide based on justice, sustainability, diversity (biodiversity and culturodiversity); he has written texts and leaflets for them: *SEE, a network of social ecology that is critical, experimental, diverse and changing to GOVERN. Invisible citizens speak up*. In 2011 he became president of the SEE-socioecolo Network, believing that when confronted with crises and politics of powerlessness, seeing the dead-end reached by nationalism closing its borders and by blind globalisation, there was a clear need for action, to find a way of having some political impact on the collective future. He became involved in the 2012 election campaign in France, calling for cultural education and a new plural vision of culture in society: cultures of all and cultures for all! He wrote *Le local-global: Changer soi pour changer la planète* [Local-Global: Change yourself to change the planet], arguing against the neore-

actionaries and for a pluralist concept of change ranging from individual choices to organisation of the planet earth: yes, we are now *de facto* experts in both specialised and general areas. Economies, as is the case for histories, have their stratifications and different levels with quantifiable and non-quantifiable data. Economies too depend on the mindset of society and local attachments. This is the singular-plural reality that must now be taken on board by each and every citizen.

Just as it is absurd to consider human beings outside a human environment, or to treat the body without treating the mind, so quantitative economic measurements need to be reviewed, revising the breakdown between the administration of community interests and its efficiency as assessed using various parameters, companies running businesses and operating according to environmental and ethical rules (a market with rules) and all the trading in financial and non-financial areas, ranging from cooperative movements to informal associations for a *gratis* economy. The criteria and organisation need to be completely reshaped, starting from outcomes expected so that conclusions can be drawn on the impact on assessment and structural organisation. This means reversing the present absurd situation where very partial measurements are used to justify or explain results utterly unsatisfactory for everybody: imbalances are damaging, starting on the simple level of economic efficiency. Similarly, in politics, opinion polls have taken over from real polls. Communities are rarely consulted (even on issues relevant to their everyday life) and in France few people vote and are the choices real? We have moved into display democracies and freedom of expression is losing out.

In 2013, based on the hypothesis that the ethical and practical changes so sorely needed can only occur through a revival of the local level, (ref: the connection to phenomena of dropping out, the ambition to live here and now: SUBITO!), he launched *CoopCultu* on www.globalmagazine.info. *CoopCultu* is a cultural and *gratis* cooperative designed to report on not only traditional cultural initiatives, but also on social, economic organisations featuring solidarity and ecology and operating *gratis*. This means a network distributing news and information on innovative communal living. As a complementary initiative, he launched the independent monthly video cultural magazine [decryptcult] on www.decryptimages.net, starting in July 2013. This too was an attempt to see value added to the innovations of the shared living experience, crossing generations, combining different players in the field, academics and artists, devising a model so that others could develop relay-media. And he more or less decided to stage his own character, the reference being to character for Orson Welles, requiring public (or indeed private) presence.

As he belongs to no circles or cliques, many see him as being nowhere. It even meant that the French civil service underpaid him for years, when holding the position of storeman from 1978 to 1991, while doing the work of curator; and while said to be on secondment from the Ministry of Agriculture, he spent ten years doing the work of the director of conservation [*conservateur général*] while remaining in the position of chief curator. His independence is therefore total and his contempt far-reaching, but he bears no grudges: money has never been his goal in life (excluding the period of unpaid unemployment, the only value of money is what we can do with it); nor has fame (a very relative concept given the reasons that drive him on). He has mainly endeavoured to influence his time and fight against prevailing mediocrity by continuing, resolutely, his actions based on generosity: what if we finally took a long, close look at our France-World? What if the country recovered the ability to build the future, to get moving again, with others?

No he cannot accept this specific local situation, i.e. the typically French destructive atmosphere of his time, arising from a small self-reproducing oligarchy, ageing now but hanging on to their privileges to the very last, with a record of lying and failure, yet refusing to step down, not letting anyone new inside (the only young ones being merely obedient, second-rate clones). In 2005, he had spoken out against the future being stolen in a cloying atmosphere of forced nostalgia (*Bas les pattes sur l'avenir !* [Hands off the future] published by Sens & Tonka): necrosis has set in, with greater inequality and insatiable greed from the same self-reproducing beings, together in a mix of economy, media and politics, gravitating around power (or what appears to be power) and money. Confronted with this, he has taken an open and courageous stand, in “Nous sommes tous des Africains !” [We are all Africans!] on globalmagazine.info, and later with France-Monde on Facebook, calling for a revival of experimentation and a clear antiracism stance as an unabashed, natural, logical position, against opponents of international scope for French culture, against those who would have France close her borders, shrinking and fearful in the face of the outside world. Never accept, never delay: drop out (DROP) so as to provide a new lease of life to the base of the movement, and immediately (SUBITO!) so as to build societies with both individual and collective choices (CHOOSE!) to restore hope (HOPE).

The question is no longer the class struggle or independence from colonial oppression; today the massive concentration of money rules and the lifestyle of western mass consumerism has eroded the culture of the planet. No, he is in the huge drop-out at the base, refusing 100% commoditisation and automated behaviour patterns, it is the defence of knowledge, both practical and theoretical (Knowledge is Beau-

tiful) for individual choices and full local-global awareness, taken over in community living in a local context with the global solidarity needed for major environmental issues both tangible and cultural.

Some have found an ironic but affectionate metaphor to describe this hyperactive and imaginative figure: the biggest iceberg of the 21st century. It is indeed amazing to have spent thirty years working on the new world of images, the philosophy of relativity, global humans and their interlinked identities, stratified history, cultural ecology, the generation gap and the coming together of generations, the return to the local level, and the local-global perspective, rejecting Progress as such but praising movement, working on monitored standardisation that abrades expressions of cultural diversity and individual freedom in the name of such Progress and security (with democracy going backwards when opinion polls replace voting polls under pressure from marketing-type news), on the emergence of societies of spectator-players; after all that, these ideas have not appeared on any real horizon of visibility in the intermediate media, not even to be challenged. Mister Local-Global (for homo relativus and against homo pyramidus from the Neolithic age and homo economicus from the era of industrial globalisation), a tireless inventor of ideas, has endured the loneliness of the long-distance thinker in an age of profusion and confusion.

He now holds a record for having caused sufficient disturbance, having upset, irritated, caused fear and jealousy without getting any of the recognition that comes with age, even in circuits far removed from the mainstream such as the Collège de 'Pataphysique. If this goes on much longer, due caution will have to be exercised to make sure that he is not given the late embalmment granted to the aged man losing his marbles: what was not done when timely must not be done when it serves no other purpose than to confirm that the person has one foot in the grave.) Thus, through his intuitive deductions over many years, his unwavering opposition to the cowardly, mediocre easy options of his era, with the unswerving continuity and multifarious aspects of his work, he stands as a useful landmark, a yardstick to measure the continental drift defining the new adventures of the present.

In his early days he analysed the change in the scale of human activities using the local-global dimension, continual ubiquity and the paradox of hyperconcentration and hypervisibility confronting the vast majority of totally invisible citizens who yet form virtually every thread of the local fabric. We are well beyond a simple performance; we have reached a point where all references and gauges have been lost in controlling societies. Never before has the question of democratic access to news and in-

formation been so critical as it is now when the decline towards the lowest common denominator, dumbing down and regimentation are serving ideological, religious and commercial causes, exploiting individuals, making them subservient, so that a tiny minority may reap the profit. Relativism is a tool that serves the powerful, whereas relativity is the defence of choice, knowledge and tolerance (Resistance of knowledge): it is time to leave confetti societies of individuals with muddled minds, doing so through education at any age, through the unremitting quest for knowledge so as to be able to make conscious choices and develop enlightened collective strategies.

In such a context, the role of intermediate media is seen as highly unsatisfactory, causing distortion and increasing risks through extreme concentration up against extreme dispersal (see the film SPECTATOR). The value of intermediate media has been exaggerated when seen in relation to the millions of individual media, so many that it is impossible to sort through them: abundance is not choice. Since the early 2000s Gervereau has been developing theories on the following paradox: times of overabundance are times of invisibility, of forgetting and conformity. His pointed criticism of intermediate media can be seen in line with his observations highlighting the serious breakdown or failure of what is referred to as democracy, or at best as the exercise of freedom: the major crisis affecting democracy in practice is also a crisis for the methods of selection and dissemination of news and information.

Here it should be noted that intermediate media are not exactly thriving, but rather surviving with very limited “news” that is relentlessly repeated and designed to sell; there is the question of their dependence on advertising or public funding, and in this age of news marketing, news has to be sold. Two other phenomena have also emerged as key audience factors: media convergence (the obligation to talk about what everyone is talking about, with waves of hysteria that can be orchestrated) and media distortion (the analysis is not important, but rather finding stories to shock or trigger a scandal in whatever “event” has been selected). These are not simple interfaces between the multitude of messages expressed and the multitude of messages received. With such trade in news stories, there is no feedback on what is done or how it is done. Intermediate media do not think; they use what they decide is news, copying one another, and as a profit-making venture. We are living with powerful agents of distortion, looking at the world through huge lenses, but only to squint.

Can independent thought be developed In such an environment? Can independent thought stand up to intellectual fashions and the puke-provoking exhibitionist displays of private life and horror? Can

well argued ideas be broadcast and identified as such, be distinctive, standing out from the general scrambling, looting and presentation of anything and everything, with texts read out but never properly read and understood, all in a context of programmed obsolescence? Here is the resistance now needed: horizontal networks of people with no media profile, anonymous individuals coming together, a federation of invisible players. The focus on memory has led to total amnesia as references have disappeared and downgrading prevails. If, as Andy Warhol said, everyone has their fifteen minutes of fame, who will be left to advocate thinking and ideas able to last more than thirty minutes?

Laurent Gervereau, at least as a personal initiative, will have refused the easy option of simplistic brand image as his sales slogan. In this age of logo-personalities forcing ideas on audiences via pre-set media practices, devised and worn out, he is deliberately creating a disturbance by intervening in different areas, introducing wide-ranging ideas (as can be seen in this extensive and sometimes intentionally repetitive biography), considering this to be the only way of reporting on the unique/multiple reality of the world. In any case, and in every case, all attire is but disguise and every public appearance a *mise-en-scène*.

These contemporary adventures thus stand as Plurofuturos (plural, experimental and evolving, requiring a demanding and critical approach) in what is, by necessity, Retrofuturo sorting. Sorting involves a choice with certain elements from the past selected to be kept in relation to our appetite for change; such sorting will discard both the totalitarian idea of modernism (the idea of a single standardised model of Progress with history brought to a halt as perfection has been achieved) and the depressing vision of postmodernism (invention and innovation are behind us, and as modernism has failed there is no scope for social change, thereby confirming existing injustices as the lesser of two evils). Of course there is always the Monoretro approach, i.e. worshipping a religious, philosophical or political system from the past, now idealised and raised the level of dogma to be enforced everywhere, intangibly. Here is a brief guide: take action at local level, resonating at remote levels (LGPP, Local-Global Production Phalanstery); enjoy the finite within the infinite; always refuse to have history stop and reject any theories of powerlessness; become aware of the value of non-monetary exchanges (GRATIS ECONOMY, ADDED HUMAN VALUE) for the new homo relativus. Act pragmatically, pro-actively, with imagination, but beware of the Promethean illusion and the lure of eugenics (beware of any form of perfection, of humans selected and automated and made to last, of any optimised planet, controlling societies and the vast worldwide hospital); invent your own path, open roads despite opposition, distribute signs.

In late 2013, he presented this vision of the new philosophical and political divisions in the world today in his book *Tu es plurofuturo ?* [Are you Plurofuturo?], which can be consulted and purchased on the Website. The French edition has an additional text: “L’écologie culturelle contre les peurs et les populismes” [Cultural ecology versus fear and populism] and the on-line version also provides free access to “Nous sommes tous des Africains” [We are all Africans]. The book was translated into Arabic in Cairo, in Chinese and English in Hong Kong and Portuguese in Brazil, with a new multi-lingual version in 2014.

Our era? It is an era of necessary and conscious relativity (the philosophy of relativity) in both time and space: Retrofuturo and local-global. What are the real rifts? There is the partition between the proponents of a set view being in the world (with knowledge closed and set, i.e. dogma) usually focusing on options that are a legacy from the past (Monoretros), and the proponents of perpetual movement with experimentation, advocating diversity through enlightened choices (critical education and ongoing research and the quest for knowledge), based on indispensable solidarity worldwide and individual freedom (Plurofuturos). It is not a matter of Development or Progress, but of movement everywhere, with Retrofuturo sorting (between innovations and selected items kept); it is not Growth, but diversified change and developments evolving as a network through the necessary forms of local-global solidarity. If this character has one lesson for us, it could be summed up as the philosophical aspect of relativity, a lesson of tolerance finally accepted. Relativity is to be part of an obligation demanded of the individual, part of the perpetual movement within collective ventures (the big bang of the choice of values, civilisations intersecting and space-time navigation through local-global and Retrofuturo dimensions. In the age of the Internet it is thus clear, although not sufficiently so in the public arena, that this is a time when two models are diametrically opposed: a controlling society or a society chosen by the player-spectators (CHOOSE!).

Laurent Gervereau now wishes to collect and conserve his work, bringing together the three different lines of activity: art (visual art, video and film), academic work (the history of visual expression and analysis of images), and philosophy and politics (publications, philosophy of relativity and the SEE-socioecolo Network). To counter the Paris-centric focus concentration of so many activities (which also harms institutions inundated with too many proposals), he wishes to take concrete steps, with physical steps in south-western France; part of his family is originally from La Force near Bergerac; he empathises with the people there (well, with most people), and loves the local landscapes, fragrances

and food of the region which he has explored since his early childhood. He has set up his workshop by the Maronne River in Haute-fage (southern Corrèze) in a secluded natural setting. He works here jointly with public institutions and on participatory initiatives as part of a gratis economy, developing his *Cité des points de vue* [City of points of view] (also the title of sculptures that will travel the world), making it a forum for sharing and discussing ideas on the world of images and local-global creativity related to sustainable development. This could be summed up as: images, sustainability, and local-global exchanges. The City now includes the FOLOGLOGERI Foundation (Fondation Local-global Gervereau pour les Images) with archives, research and education on visual work (www.decryptimages.net), philosophical and practical aspects of ecology through discussions with Coopliberterra and the SEE-socioecolo Network (www.see-socioecolo.com) fostering all forms of tangible and social experimentation on sustainable development, the PPLG Phalanstery of original visual and other art works (*PPLG - Phalanstère de Productions Local-Global*) where Laurent Gervereau does his own original works (and this will be his main occupation once he has retired from paid employment) and hosting many initiatives by other original artists working in different fields and wanting to be part of the dialogue between local and global levels via UNIK works and other works of mass distribution.

It is a living site, innovative and green; it is part of the local fabric; it is educational and cultural, in synergy with the local economy, and with scope extending nationally and internationally and it has reasonable tourist appeal. All of this still needs to be worked out and certain activities may be separated, with the section on images and the archives going to a public institution, perhaps setting up an association and then a foundation for original visual and other art forms, leaving an informal and convivial international network for a socio-ecological cooperative think-tank. Whatever the case, the idea is to conserve the work and to hand it on to people who count, who are proficient, devoted and motivated, and as part of a local-global network. This is the *raison d'être* for the event in and around Argentat-sur-Dordogne, *Rencontres-Promenades "Histoires de passages..."* being held for the first time from July 17 to 19, 2015.

For the moment he is looking after his health. And more so than in the past, he is contemplating what is essential, still amazed by the blinkeredness, stupidity and mediocrity to be seen, yet convinced of the considerable potential to be found at an individual level and which is often wasted. He is calling for awareness, and experimentation, and generosity. He is advocating Resistance through knowledge

(K-Pride: Knowledge is beautiful!), with messages conveyed via 47 signs on this Website and forming what could be described as a philosophical kit. The signs are designed as the basis for individual choices to be made on education, research and learning at any age, with proper respect for scholars and original artists.

He considers that there must be a shift from the performance society to a society with spectator-players, to be achieved by developing relay-media, contrasting with basic media and conventional intermediate media (these, by definition, being limited in scope and invariably repetitive). Once again: abundance kills choice. The question then raised is the role of news and, quite simply, of the democracy of news/information. Such a democracy cannot exist in a setting with intermediate media, their task being precisely to conduct a selection process, unless relay-media can develop and, through networking, enhance the value of select initiatives coming from the grassroots level. This is clearly the direction followed with the experimentation of the cultural video magazine [*decryptcult*] and *CoopCultu* on *globalmagazine.info*. But all of this needs to be scaled up, and in every field. There will be a return to the local with the annual event “*Histoires de passages...*” in Argentat-sur-Dordogne from July 17 to 19, 2015, in a local-global perspective.

He now lives with a rebel near the vineyards in Montmartre, Paris, and has been delighted by the latest addition, Victor, who could easily look at home on the Mongolian steppes. He feels eminently Parisian, or eminently Occitan, or eminently Inuit, or eminently Futunan, and eminently happy in Xaintrie too; in fact eminently French, being eminently international, in this France-World (see Facebook) that wishes to keep on conveying universal messages. Knows there is a date looming. Is living without any regrets about his relentless efforts to make an impact on his present, despite all the stumbling blocks. Has no ambition to hang around for the sake of hanging around. Wishes to enjoy life, take action, discover and maintain his free thinking.

When no longer operational, would like his body to be cast into the ocean (for example, off the isle of Molène) to feed the fish, or perhaps be buried in Saint Vincent cemetery in Montmartre (or in Hauteclage, in Xaintrie) with the simple inscription: “I shall live in you.”



ORLAN dans l'émission [decryptcult], vidéomag d'écologie culturelle sur www.decryptimages.net (créé en 2013)