

Towards the design of decisions

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In the Garden of Eden, and thanks be to God, man could enjoy without hindrance the benefits of a world where everything was balance and abundance, harmony and benevolence, a world where the gazelle rubbed shoulders with the lion, where water was pure and food was at hand. It was enough for man to taste the fruit of the knowledge of Good and Evil for everything to go wrong, and to be driven out of it. It was enough for him to be confronted with the need to choose, the need to make decisions.

For such is indeed the burden of our species: to be in the position at every moment to make decisions, small or large, individual or collective, in the hope of finding the Garden of Eden and its carelessness, freeing ourselves from the need to make them ever again.

In the dream world of modernity, a world free of God, humanity has plunged into another belief, that ever-growing knowledge - science - gave it the means to read the mechanics of the world and to become its watchmaker, to be the reader as well as the pilot of a determinism of which it would be the beneficiary.

A predictable world, a determined world, a world without history.

A world without crisis.

If this modernist illusion was shattered in the 20th century (2 world wars, the Shoah) it resurfaced after the fall of the Berlin Wall, with Western democracies and capitalism thinking they could finally reach the homeostasis of the Garden of Eden. Certainly, the road would be long and sometimes chaotic, but such chaos would be the exception, and even rarefied as our knowledge and the tools that it engenders grew.

It would be the end of history.

This illusion has its roots in Descartes. It is the illusion of analysis. As a Method, this capacity to solve problems - that is to say, to reveal their determinisms - always consists in dividing them into sub-problems, which are more readable, more comprehensible and easier to solve, and then articulating their determinisms and solutions. The industrial revolution is the result, as the amplifier, of the implementation of this method: separating, cutting, dissecting, then recomposing, assembling. Thanks to Descartes and his Method, the world becomes a large assembly line: factories of course, but also cities, administrations, public services, the State. And schools.

In this system, our engineering, management and administrative Grandes Ecoles train the elite, i.e. those who will be able and in a position to manage this major assembly line and thus take the necessary decisions. Our primary schools, middle schools and high schools are preparing for this, training our minds more and more to enter this model which would have proven itself so well (but which nobody envies us for). And whether they are conquering, regulating or resolving, these elites, so sure of themselves, pre-empt the powers, political or economic, academic or industrial, and obviously because they are the best.

Yes, but there you have it. The Cartesian illusion is shattering over reality. The apparent power of the method has engendered an open, globalized, technical world, with a (over)population that is mobile, numerous and consuming, as eager for material benefits as it is for freedoms, and which has produced new and colossal problems: digital transformation, climate crisis, biodiversity crisis, democratic crisis, economic crisis.

This 21st century is thus witnessing the affirmation of very great challenges for humanity, which in fact define as many great designs that we believe require a new method, breaking with the old Cartesian models and methods, without abandoning the project of emancipation and social harmony born of the Enlightenment, and its democratic ideals. In many respects, Edgar Morin's discourse on complexity, also expressed and structured in a work called "The Method", proposes a systemic and holistic thinking, much more able to embrace these challenges. But beyond thinking, we must also put ourselves into action, through a new approach. And this approach has a name: design.

Not the design of the 20th century, as a supplement to marketing, put at the service of the desirability of goods alone, but the design of the 21st century, put at the service of living together and caring.

More than a profession, more than a method, more than a discipline, design is today a new paradigm, a new stance towards the world, the living being(s) and its problems, carried by demanding professionals, readers of the complexity of the world, who contribute to creating the conditions for successful life experiences.

All these words have a precise meaning.

The word Design comes from the Italian "*Disegno*", which means both *Drawing* and *Purpose*, *Representation* and *Project*. It refers to a time when art and science were not separated, when those who designed basilicas and Duomo were also those who decorated them. A *Leonardesco* time.

Where the Cartesian method dissolves complexity and makes it disappear by cutting everything up into pieces (problems, disciplines, knowledge, people), design grasps problems in their totality, like systems, but where human issues are central, that is to say everywhere.

Where the old ways considered that the project was known (progress, mastery of the world through technology) and that the only stakes were to master the processes to accomplish it, with people being there to implement them, the new holistic approach to design considers that the stake is to reaffirm the human project (individual emancipation, social harmony) by focusing on people, their projects and their life experience.

This requires the acquisition and articulation of multiple forms of knowledge, including the Human and Social Sciences, necessary to observe and understand human life. It therefore requires collaboration, and the abandonment of the very idea of the providential man or solitary creator, to affirm the idea of the articulation of individual talents and collective success.

It requires knowing how to construct questions before answering them, because everything starts from the quality of the question. It is because we have come out of a world in which all we have to do is get on board the train of progress and let ourselves be carried along, to now enter into another more complex and changing world, that the project must be redefined and repositioned regularly through questioning of quality.

This also requires a lot of creativity in the search for answers to these questions. Where engineers will rush to the first answer, designers will look for dozens of them, even if they are crazy or daring. They explore without taboos, invoking all disciplines and collaborating with all their proponents, crossbreed and hybridize their ideas, and above all illustrate them systematically, allowing thought to crystallize to better evaluate and share it.

This also requires the talent to materialize them, as much to test them as to convince, as much to increase them as to show them.

All these talents gathered to construct questions and solve problems, often considered elsewhere as "Soft Skills", are the "Hard Skills" of designers.

These Softs Skills are regularly listed as the new talents of tomorrow's leaders, the men - and we hope these women - who make and will make the decisions that crises and challenges, large or small, economic or political, pose and will pose to human organizations.

It will then become clear that those who are already the bearers of this talent, and have been for a long time, are at least as well equipped to take part in it, and to finally enter the circles of power, in the State and its public services as in the economy and the business world.

These circles of power are today pre-empted by the only technocrats, engineers, managers from these famous schools that form our elites who co-opt each other, thus reproducing a unique and hegemonic way of thinking. The necessary entry into these designer circles will change everything, by bringing back and sharing an effective systemic method centred on the human being, giving meaning to the knowledge of their fellow engineers and managers who are often disconnected from human realities.

The state of the world today is more than worrying on all scales, from the entire planet to the street corner. And there is a form of urgency to be efficient and fair in solving the problems that arise at all these scales. In order to focus on all the stakeholders in these situations and ensure their well-being, it is necessary to change the method, to move from Descartes to Morin, from separation to reunion, from solitary power to collaborative resolution.

It is time to take care of the planet and the people.
It is time to decide differently. It's time for design.

This article has been first published in Arnaud Marion's book : "Partout où je passe, les memes erreurs" – Editions Eyrolles