

Consciousness and Lucidity

“Consciousness and lucidity are not clear landscapes. They are constantly changing expanses, filled with the confrontation of light and shadow, and nothing found there exists in a single manner, but in hundreds and thousands of possible ways.”

J.M.G. Le Clézio, *L'Extase matérielle* (1967)

There is no better time to reflect on our country's future. I am not thinking here of the political or economic situation, even if either of them may give us cause for concern, for they are mere moments in history which will merit only a footnote in the chronicles of the new century. What I really want to discuss is our keen awareness that upheavals of profound power and intensity are in the process of permanently reshaping the moral landscape in which our institutions have been built.

We are not the first society to live through such changes. Such is the nature of all societies, as soon as they are seen through the lens of history. But despite the advantages of hindsight, the tools in our possession today provide no more help than those our ancestors had at their disposal when they had to face invasions, epidemics, or even simply new developments in science and technology.

The 20th century placed its trust in the language and dynamics of the political. Struggles for power and authority dominated social life, subsuming all the other dimensions of the human condition: work, ideologies, religions, economic interests, the creation of art, and the pursuit of science. The international system completely abandoned itself to the pursuit of power. Over time, our predilection for political tools rendered them the dominant intellectual instruments every time we were confronted with a crisis or puzzled by a new challenge, whether financial market turbulence or the conquest of space. I suspect that our present efforts to control economic cycles or ease tensions among nations will appear as strange to future generations as the incantations and sacrifices prescribed by the sorcerers and wise men of old now appear to us.

The major threats facing our societies today are not being mitigated by the well-worn paths recommended by conventional wisdom. The national and territorial framework, where we are accustomed to exercising the privileges of our citizenship, simply cannot react to the strength of transnational forces. The current degradation of our environment calls for radical solutions that our political culture cannot even begin to articulate. Under the strain of unprecedented inequalities, declarations of human rights are becoming whispers at precisely the moment when one would expect them to be loudly affirmed. What can we conclude, based on our collective inability to bring peace or progress to different regions, countries or continents?

When the incantations and sacrifices of the magi failed to calm storms or make rain fall, they uttered more incantations or sacrificed more victims. When doctors failed to heal their patients, they increased bloodlettings and purges. Could it be we are doing the same thing now with politics? The problems we face call for new solutions, not just more of the same medicine, even if administered with all the conviction in the world.

An organization such as the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation can play a role in the quest for new responses. We have two obvious and unique advantages: the freedom we enjoy to choose the major themes for our reflection—which obviously encompass the big questions alluded to here—and our ability to attract the most brilliant and most original minds. Our third asset is less apparent, but no less important. It emerges from our strong commitment to pluralism and interdisciplinarity: the insights resulting from the profusion of viewpoints and the peaceful co-existence among scholars in a number of disciplines.

To put it another way, we rapidly concluded that the answers which we seek cannot come only from the disciplines that are specifically and fundamentally “political”: law, political science, philosophy, or economics. To paraphrase Le Clézio, we recognize that no single approach, no single methodology has a monopoly over “consciousness and lucidity.” What if we can succeed in distancing ourselves from outdated knowledge hierarchies and eliminate the traditional oppositions between hard sciences and the humanities, between theory and practice, between abstraction and experience? Only then will the desired insights emerge from the strength of understanding to be found in the hybridization and integration of different sorts of knowledge.

Clearly, this does not rule out making fine lines of distinction, measuring gaps, or recognizing differences. Guy Vanderhaeghe’s remarkable essay, found in this second edition of the *Trudeau Foundation Papers*, speaks very eloquently to this issue. The author, a novelist, is interested in the historian’s approach and attempts to understand what a work of fiction adds to or subtracts from our knowledge of the past. In an arresting passage, where he raises the issue of outrage or even horror—after all, a gang rape has occurred Vanderhaeghe manages to show how his own work of re-creating the facts makes it possible to move from an intellectual contemplation

of a scandal toward moral engagement. No lengthy explanation is needed to understand that this empathic mechanism—to move us toward moral engagement—is precisely what must underpin the radical reform of many of our institutions.

The return of Rosemary Sullivan to her work as a biographer has a similar goal. As a specialist in Elizabeth Smart, Gwendolyn MacEwen, and Margaret Atwood, she explores their texts to discover, through characters and circumstances, what makes a journey from oblivion or darkness toward hope possible. Her description of that struggle becomes a sort of intellectual autobiography. It is a world in perpetual motion, wherein each character discovers the threat of the conditions of their birth, and embarks on a struggle to escape at any cost. I am struck by this idea of flight—whether from family, country, class, or gender—as the source of revolt.

The world that François Crépeau depicts in his Trudeau lecture is also marked by flight and departure. But here, the driving forces are misery, fear, and humiliation more often than rebellion. In contrast to the so-called global village that the world economy would have built, Crépeau's legal training helps him to illustrate a universe closed in everywhere by borders, controls, and restrictions. Migrants upset and disturb the status quo. In some circles, the discussion focuses on driving them out rather than welcoming them or protecting them, as if a beleaguered state could redeem itself by bringing the last remnants of its power into play against those not blessed with our good fortune. The need and aspiration of migrants is a universal human phenomenon that law and power lack the compassion to grasp, but it is one which we must understand and face without delay.

The task that Kathleen Mahoney has taken on is no less pressing. In a text infused with the rhythms of a musical composition, this exceptional lawyer shows how certain concepts of justice develop and become institutionalized in society. I am struck by the entirely

dialectic importance she attaches to the tools of intuition and language, which for her play just as vital a role in representing justice as in the way it is codified through institutions. The text also suggests that anger and trust are two flying buttresses of equal strength here, the first pitting the excluded and subordinate against the established order, and the second suggesting that progress is, nevertheless, possible and even sustainable.

These emotions are also laid bar—albeit with a robust sense of iron—in the multi-faceted explorations of John B. Robinson. Environmental crises cannot be discussed without some categorization—this is not new. Neither is it certain that they will ever be managed, and one gets the feeling that even this objective of success has become suspect—in itself a collective problem that also demands collective knowledge. Robinson, who knows all that, takes another path which leads him to promote bold methods oriented around what I might call, for lack of a better name, the *cognitive* mobilization of the public. He also suggests that we get as far away as possible from traditional modes of political action prescribed by established hierarchie, and, on the contrary, focus on increasing multiple channels of communication and influence.

I am struck by the convergence of perspectives within the five essays found here. It is impossible not to be provoked by the humility with which the author—all experts in their own right—approach the complexity of the topics they explore. Consequently, they recognize that no simplistic solution or single formula could apply. And they suggest that if the complexity of these new and intersecting paths is embraced, there are the possibilities of renewing our trust in public institutions and finding opportunity for collective action.

This convergence is not the result of collusion nor does it reflect a common agenda. In truth, many factors should conspire to separate our authors, who work in very different disciplines and who often never cross each other's paths before being chosen for a

Trudeau award. Yet their thought processes are imbued with a similar spirit of responsibility and solidarity, one that has no desire to exist apart from the social world and its requirements.

I also believe that the Trudeau Foundation is doing everything possible to broaden its community's field of vision. Everyone who is asked to participate in our activities experiences the benefits and richness of interdisciplinary exchange, direct contact, and experience with others who bring very different perspectives. However, I am increasingly finding that what unites Trudeau Fellows is their common hope to see their intellectual adventure take on more diverse forms and then to reverberate in other fields of activity. There are "hundred, and thousands of possible ways," as Le Clézio has said. I also think they are united by a similar desire to place their talent, their eloquence, and their intelligence at the service of humanity, far from the spirit of competition. I invite you to read their lectures and experience this for yourself.

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