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## **ECOLOGY IN THE FACE OF CIVILIZATIONAL ADDICTIONS**

Below I will try to note down the selected items of discussion that became known during the II Mind Ecology Symposium organised by the *Polish Bateson Research Group*. It was held between the 1st and 4th of June in the Silesian Botanical Garden in Mikołów, as part of the preparations for the following year's event which would be part of the preparation of the ecology summit in Poland. Paweł Kojs, PhD, director of the Silesian Botanical Garden and manager of the Polish Academy of Sciences Botanical Garden in Powsin, was a splendid host and the debate was co-created by guests from a number of countries including Austria, Singapore, Canada, Lithuania, Sweden, Italy, USA and Poland, especially experts from the Advisory Board of the *International Bateson Institute* in Stockholm. The discussion discipline plan was composed of: medical doctors, physiotherapists and psychotherapists, artists and scientists, university humanists and employees from different social sectors, including social care and education. Even the co-founder of *Greenpeace* took part. Two volumes of texts were prepared as a basis for discussion, the event was held under the auspices of two voivodship marshals: Piotr Całbecki from the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship (with the financial support of the office) and Mieczysław Struk from the Pomorskie Voivodship. The authorities of the following higher education schools took part in the preparation of the meetings and publications: WSB University in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Pomeranian University in Słupsk and Kujawy and Pomorze University in Bydgoszcz. An Ecological Festival was announced for next year. It is to be held in the same place and utilise a series of seminars and workshops to tackle climate, health and refugee issues, taking into account of the contexts which create a feedback for addictions as a well as brain research which allows to recognize communicational traps of the so-called *double bind* type as well as shape a new quality of system learning, which would alleviate the actions of social

institutions. Addictions are linked not only to drugs but also encompass self-destructive habits and practices which are institutionally sustained without recognition of their harmfulness and already transforming into global, civilizational dangers. They are the more dangerous as many do not even realise their existence. Meanwhile the mobilization against the self-destructive actions targets not individual humans cases but whole structures and macro processes supported on a grand scale globally.

### THE INVISIBLE “META” CRISIS IS COMING

The ideas of the “ecology of the mind” which have already been referred to by the author in this publication several times<sup>1</sup> and developed following the heritage of Gregory Bateson, including his symbolic book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, which encompasses the fight against many ideas about ecology with a “trans-contextual” basis for humanists. At the same time they carry the concern for the comprehensive treatment of environmental challenges which on a macro scale push not only for technological solutions and political decisions but (maybe even mainly) also concern the lifestyles of individuals, sensitivity and social perceptions as well as new ways of relating to the *Otherness* also in the future. Hence, the importance of a more encompassing and deeper perspective for the perception of the manifestations of civilizational addictions. Only a fragment, though an important one, is related to the attitude towards water, air, plant & animals life – so everything that designates the environmental horizon and the disturbance of which may have unforeseeable consequences, rising exponentially and noticed when it is too late and when sensitivity to those issues is not shaped in a society perceived through the perspective of the Earth’s resistance to destructive human actions.

The crisis is largest not when we feel it, worry and when we still do not find intensively searched solution, but only if we do not realize it is coming, remaining in blissful and irresponsible ignorance. This is a type of meta-crisis or incapacity to recognize the symptoms of a growing collapse, of nearing an abyss. A “meta” crisis is a crisis of a lack of alternative and the ability to look from the outside, from a different perspective that makes one sensitive to what is not seen or does not trigger concern as well as

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<sup>1</sup> See *Ekologia*, issue 2/74/2015, issue 2/78/2016.

does not mobilize action outside the available pool of solutions. In a rush we miss even the appearance of large scale phenomena, we underestimate the so called “hot data” because they require to be focused on using newly developed analysis and care skills as well as group engagement. Otherwise they remain invisible, unrecognized, easy to deprecate. The problem with the invisibility of the self-destruct mechanisms in their environments requires other benchmarks than visible markers or standard signals, especially when changes can happen in increments or exponentially, when can make the warning in time. One can see or know something and not care because this thing does not interest us as an underestimated problem even though it comes at us with a large number of indirect symptoms and is related to additions even without a substantial reference and self-destructive in its results. It may be too late to escape the avalanche, let alone stop it. It is time to assume that in many ways there is “something wrong” with our civilization, when we stay lethargic or work as sleep-walkers, not vigilant nor critically mobilised, lacking critical awareness, the ability to systematically learn on maintained and hidden mistakes.

### FOR A NEW FORM OF ECOLOGY IN THOUGHT AND ACTION

Ecology can be perceived as a rich tradition of fighting for a change of the attitude towards human environment in its different scopes even though it sprang mostly from the traditional framework of economics by critiquing it as the universal criterion of progress and advancement. “Economy of nature” was probably the first used definition of ecology as a perspective which took into account the “interest” of nature. It was necessary to combat the trivial discourse of economics, which universalized the profit calculation but also the futility of a simple rejection without promoting a deeper alternative, like the one proposed by Pierre Bourdieu who stressed the need to develop each time an economics which would consider characteristics of the different cultural practices. In such a case it is possible to speak of a symbolic profit, of a developmental profit, of an emotional profit, or a profit which would enrich with the quality of being rooted in culture.

We know that the need for a global change in the perception of world ecology is on the rise – even if slowly and inconsistently – and the climate summit held in Katowice in December 2018 was supposed to be

the manifestation of this need. As part of caring for the well-being of the planet and the human species we need a civilisational transformation. It is not enough to wait for changes to be pressured by social movements. Sometimes you can even see the hypocrisy of ecological movements as they live off what they do, although it should not be deprecated, because many wonder only if something can be changed in regards to the inertia of the systems of government in a global space? Environmentalists are often under the pressure to reporting progress in some scope as they must show their achievements to their sponsors or employers and use categories of the highly inadequate economy of profit.

Waiting for politicians or technocrats and even ecological movements to change anything effectively, sufficiently and appropriately to the challenge seems to be a simple illusion or naivety. Great problems and sacrifices are or remain invisible to many of the ones making decisions; institutions will not change without a modification of attitude towards them, especially as sometimes taken over by ways of thinking that degrade their functions. We need to differentiate the forms, patterns and levels of advancement of thought and actions in a scope with a complexity that cannot be grasped by simple adaptation strategies or modifications. A new vision of civilizational realism cannot be substituted with a parameter measurement when the qualitative side of the bettering of the conditions of individual spheres is lost under social pressure. As Gaston Bachelard showed, reductive visions or realism are possible, in part represented by technocratic methods of thinking and only engineering activities as part of the attitudes which do not show criticism towards the assumptions.

One can often see the tyranny of pertinence seen in a too short time scale – interventions in the area of the dysfunction can be additionally destructive when the engineering approach to solutions also becomes part of the problem. When is too narrow and bears sources of new threats. Agriculture has led to excess land wear as part of regular efficiency engineering which became a new stage of the problem it was supposed to solve. Reactions reduced to technical procedures are not sufficient, even if they are more sophisticated solutions, which do not recognize hidden or prolonged costs and effects which cannot be perceived linearly when they are dispersed and hidden in various forms and cannot become a subject of management or control. An approach to dysfunction may itself carry a dysfunctions towards its task – there are many contexts to map which

show the dimension of addiction and trans-contextual entanglements. The ability to auto correct is becoming crucial. Although the greatest problems are caused by a minority of the world population armed with advanced technology and colonialism contributed to them in the past, now civilization colonised itself with aggressive consumption on a global scale or hurting the environment – hence the need for a new planetary awareness and not only new technologies or formal international agreements.

We must free ourselves from an addiction to a blind escalation of consumption... arms race, nuclear tests, wars happen due to down to the earth or even under the earth causes, like resources, including oil in the Middle East. This happens despite lofty phrases. We cannot fall prey to the dinosaur paradox – they disappeared because (in one of the interpretations) they had to become bigger and bigger to compete and we share the same entanglement in an absurd race for futile scale, as with the arms race or production scale. We have seen calculation of the potential multiple destruction of the planet as if this was an advantage for any one or a reason to be proud and not afraid of the absurdities of the escalation of civilizational self-destruction and in a state of dependence on military corporations as well as being blinded by the aspiration for hegemony.

The modern man needs a new mentality – to become a citizen of the planet, responsible for the future of the coming generations – able to correct his own behaviour assessed with this perspective, for example when it comes to emitting pollution or distancing himself from the cultural heritage allowing for a deeper shaping of humanity in the commune of the diverse species. It is also time to deal with individual lifestyles on a larger scale by posing a problem of group identities, including national identities which create for example issues with the approach to the drama of refugees; and this generates a dependence on fixations which reject diversity, on a dominance of fear and a rise of desensitisation even though the ancestors of the ones who are now insensitive have taken full advantage of the help offered to those running from war, genocide or hunger and despondence.

### **NEW COGNITIVE STRATEGY**

A starting point can be found in means of perception of the opposition, usually reduced to dichotomies, polarisations and exclusions, while it is necessary to open oneself to thought and cultural traditions (for example:

zen) richer than the manifestations of the superiority known in the West and which are directly transmitted from the sphere of technological success to human sensitivity which is often an illusion. In different traditions, including references to the perception of holiness as separation from the *profanum*, the domination oppositions (for example the perception of male/female relationships) are entangled in a threat of the so called “schism genesis” or “schizoidness” where is no room for negotiation of the cooperation of differences, mutual intermingling and enrichment through the difficult integration and interaction. At this point crucial is the issue of the quality in the treatment of oppositions as mutually exclusive opposites instead of significant feedback loops cooperating in creation of a difficult unity. This opens the job to seek means to complexity via new types of reaction and not exclusion or branding and the will to mutually destroy each other. Single truths from another world do not have to be excluded automatically in everything as worse.

Staying away from dichotomies is becoming more of a civilizational challenge even though using black and white schemes which allow one to separate from the ability to critically monitoring own errors is comfortable and is prevalent in different cultural instances. This is followed by a care for living, new ideas and not dead or blind beliefs. Different cultural modifications are necessary: helping people to free themselves from attachment to oneself and one’s socializing immersion as binding for others; staying away from the pressure to hurry and automation of reaction which kill curiosity, reflection and eliminate the chance for creative innovation; a suspension of assimilation claims. This involves an identity as open interactively as possible and not decidedly eliminating diversity or shifting diversity territory into a dictatorship of homogenic obsessions, fears, frustrations or fundamentalist variants. Almost any place may become a site for uncontrolled hateful behaviour, laced with fear of terrorism or retaliatory measures as well as low levels of sensitivity to the fate of whole societies affected by cataclysms or wars which have no regard for boundaries, like tsunamis. Ecology of the spiritual becomes an imperative of the moment.

We often become hostages of false epistemology (and logic in illusory inference), that is attitudes linked to harmful silent axioms which do not confirm their claims, just like the unthinking belief that: (a) what is good will become better when there is more of it – we lose from our view the risk of harmful excess and exaggeration of, for example, escalation of

production and the pursuit of profit (b) among differences and choices severances must dominate and there is no need to see the links between them – the dichotomisation of understanding and sharing is often the price, for example of body and spirituality into separate and individually coordinated spheres; (c) directness participation becomes an automatic guarantee of understanding of the thing we are taking part in without having to build complex interpretative structures which would give deeper, indirect perspective amidst other views. That is why it is crucial to cause a difference which will expose the effects of pseudo-distinctions as “pseudo-genre divisions” attitudes, as shown by Erik Erikson<sup>2</sup>, dichotomizing what is closely linked, the links which cannot be seen.

### THE CURSE OF ADDICTION

Historically addictions were first seen as a moral deficiency or a reprehensible frailty of the unit itself in a view typical for patopsychology bringing condemnation, punishment and rejection. Later it was seen as an effect of exposure to far way too easy access to drugs and generated prohibitive or repressive mechanisms, limiting access and punishing for usage and dealing, although today we know that soldiers did not automatically become addicted despite using drugs on the field of battle, and the medical function of certain substances cannot be negated. More and more often people start to see it mainly as interference, a disease in the brain – it is still attributed to the individual, as a professional mantra backed by neurocognitive research. And although images of the brain on cocaine are known and meaningful and the change in behaviour is visible, it is not enough to reduce addiction to a state of the brain. Lastly, a fourth kind of approach to addiction is coming to public light and it is seen as crucial learning disorder which can be attributed to a lack of access to higher levels of cognition, according to Gregory Bateson<sup>3</sup>. Adaptation and pathology are incorporated as poles of a field in which addiction can be perceived as a total adaptation to one stimulus with a stifling or blocking the access to other stimuli, especially emotional and rational, outside the sphere of pleasure and the need to compensate. You can be

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<sup>2</sup> See L. Witkowski (2015).

<sup>3</sup> See M. Jaworska-Witkowska, L. Witkowski (ed.) (2016).



addicted cognitively, even through socialization behaviour and a fixated identity as style of experience synthesis, excluding others and not just to some substance. It is possible for a teacher to become addicted to control strategies (including an addiction to constant talking – having power means being listened to). Addiction to getting rid of obesity can also be weight down by obsession up to anorexia. Addiction to the race for prestige or position, including media presence, or addiction to success in prize seeking, for example: sweets, love, recognition, can sometimes be stopped with a shock changing the perception of the world, for example after a heart attack. Meanwhile, it becomes necessary to work on the ability to change attitudes without prior traumatic experience which would give impetus to getting “sober” or “awakening”.

More and more often finding sense hidden under common meanings, that all degrade or hide deeper thought and sensitivity, is a requirement for showing the complexity of the phenomena which restores the ability to achieve a new quality of response to threats. In the case of addictions it is not only about recognizing the addiction with imagining the remedy mostly in the form of clinical and pharmacological procedures (threatening a new sickness). It is not just about the mechanical forces but the dynamic of the entanglements and this dynamic can be spiritual, can be transformed. Addiction is usually inscribed in a way that is not recognized by person addicted to the habits, everyday practice and perceptions of the norm. It is possible to get addicted to a lifestyle, to dietary routine, to the everyday duty mill, from relations pushing you into workaholism, etc.

### **A NEW LEVEL OF LEARNING**

Even poetry can be used to raise ethical sensitivity and language for the need of technocrats and serving the interest of technical efficiency and effectiveness cannot be alien to humanists. Widening the language potential of social narrations is becoming necessary for metaphors to work on the imagination, so that perceived differences become a significant generator of a new approach in its transformation of attitudes. Man as a sleep-walker unable to wake up in time before the catastrophe is one of the examples of civilizational diagnosis. When the masses act like a “child in fog” or a “drunk ship” it is not only situational frailty but a drastic opening of a road to the abyss. There is a weight of combining words and revealing



the sphere of silence, meditation and conceptualizing, grasping the whole and absorption of fragments and details. What is most obvious often starts to be suspicious in connection to stiffness without the ability to consider the alternative and systematic learning from other systems of thought. Showing hidden or fuzzy meanings by reductive cultural practices is an opportunity to identify and overcome such reductions. Otherwise we become dominated by a masquerade in the disguise of the naked truth supported by the authoritarian pressure of power.

Providing energy and resources does not help in solving problems if it is used in the wrong direction harmfulness of which is not recognized, for example when you pump money into a bottomless pit or tolerate an institution without the ability of system learning which would fix the structural issues, for example the issues of the health care system. Systems can work correctly (meaning: technically efficient) in the wrong direction.

This also happens on the level of the individuals, for example when an alcoholic runs away from the sick society surroundings not recognizing that escape's style as sick and leading into a disease which is often more dangerous. For some violence and greedy acquisition (of status, goods, position of power) is a sense of life which entangles the person in an existential addiction toxic for the surroundings and often self-destructive. Distrust of a different treatment sometimes is a necessary element of human nature and thus it triggers the process in which in fact becomes the extreme element of human nature or a macro personality pattern for whole societies. Addiction to fears and increasing hostility becomes a defence strategy carrying self-destruct mechanisms as it is hoped for by the instigators of the wave of terrorism.

The importance of the need to change the way of thinking about leadership and the strategies of mass behaviour programming which frees from the need to think and in control by the power elites also becomes apparent. We do not need a traditional model of leadership or legislation and even the one dominant in politics or management of the macro social processes increasingly seems to be harmful. The issue of the quality of leadership against the traditional views of a structure with an authoritarian leader with an a priori advantage of being right shows its trappings in crisis management. That is linked to the importance of critical thinking in terms of traps in the adaptive practices especially when we create our own traps, as thought thresholds.

A missed approach to the problem of addiction may increase the scale of the phenomenon. A fight saturated with pathology may increase the intensity of what is thought and hinder the solution, becoming a part of the problem, usually unrecognized. An addiction to the stereotypical associations with the mechanics of authority, party system and parliamentary democracy creates losses surprising for many and easy triumphs for forces praying on low human emotions while exposing the right to resentments and hostility rejecting otherness even if it comes from desperate situations.

### IMPORTANCE OF WORKING ON HOPE

The ecology of mind must pay particular attention to the minimum energy required to balance the fears, sense of threat or uncertainty that might degrade the people feeling them as well as cause degraded and degrading reactions and whole defence mechanisms, full of aggression or resignation, destroying the quality of life for those around. Working on hope becomes crucial.

Creating a space for social hope seems to be the cornerstone of ecology creating niches conducive to sustainable development as otherwise it generates fears, an eruption of hostility and escalates the need to retaliate. And then the logic of resentment takes hold. The weight of hope can however be perfidious and even subversive as it frees one from the motivation to fight for it and is substituted with a restitutionary attitude or illusory waiting. With the fiasco of traditional educational practices, with the “end of the culture of learning” (as has been shown in the analysis of Zygmunt Bauman) it becomes necessary to create a new approach to foster change by taking part in transforming one’s own fate. Around the term “symmathesy” Nora Bateson<sup>4</sup> formulated a postulate for an attitude based on collaborative, interactive learning together with our imperfections, without the notions of infallibility. That is why an attitude, which would have place for updating of practices, taking over to your own innovative use, motivating to your own transformations, is necessary. It is not about a hope as waiting to be a better musician, for example, but as work on becoming better, work in which determination without a guarantee of success is a better stimulus of

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<sup>4</sup> See N. Bateson (2016), p. 168–193.

change than a methodical certainty of procedures used. We need a place for symmathesy so a sphere for common learning through sharing experiences joining people in a sense of fate that may always become our share: a healthy person can be permanently ill, can become homeless even if he has a stable life, ignoring someone's defeat may be defeated himself, refusing to help someone may need help himself, rejecting refugees may himself be condemned to look for rescue.

Getting rid of an addiction opens space for hope by removing the pressure from the prior environment and by looking for an alternative setting and a community sharing it, for example Anonymous Alcoholics. Coming out of an addiction requires an alternative way of life but not based on a rigid sober/drunken opposition but rather by an effort for searching a new sense of life in the new space separate from the opposition. It is also not enough to present the right/wrong opposites in schools, if there is no barrier motivating in a reflective manner to rejecting with a deeper right and it even may sometimes start a process of pushing into the direction of a negative identification with what is prohibited.

It may sometimes be useful to have memory akin to an old robot which reacts in a fixed manner and is dominated by patterns providing certainty and repeatability of the stimulus-response relation without learning from one's errors. Modern robots become more capable of systematic learning than whole social environments.

It is recognized that addiction is linked to being caught up in constraints and so called "double bind" traps and without noticing we start to live in a way that kills us. Some systems block themselves, become paralyzed by improving their adaptation to the trap into which they fell without knowing. However, in order to get out of the trap, you need to start learning but by unlearning the stereotypical solutions related to identity as a style of experienced synthesis. If we assume that the pathology is mainly the inability to give sense to the world around the organism as part of caring for a balanced environmentally and future development, the dominant norm is often linked to a pathology which has not been recognized. Looking for a bond for the communities too often happens at the expense of innocent victims and is linked to a price which cannot be accepted due to the worth of human being and to the future of the species.

One should also not underestimate the importance of combining internal energy for making changes and for expanding its new reserves. It is

not about romantic sublimation but about the prose of life and courage against heresy, again the dominating civilizational patterns used by the big players of the global village macroworld because the new quality of the understanding of the processes started as courage to be a heretic gives a chance to choose another way of life.

In a common interpretation, making it unacceptable, heresy is a term belonging to degradation of meaning. Many of the trends prevailing in the western civilization need revision and have to be stopped. The ability to rebel against the dominant styles of thinking is a root of the indispensable rationality.

### ENDING: NEW TASKS FOR THE ECOLOGY OF MIND

It is hard to create a living environment that would feed people with impulses for the spirit and its balanced development in possible symbiosis with others. Looking for a new approach which would initialize actions deleting the escalation of danger is an immediate educational and cultural task. It is not enough to protect forests, especially when they are assaulted, it is time – as some say – to learn to be the forest as a living community sheltering life for others.

Differences in experience are usually a basis for rejection and not for opening up and in those cases the difference does NOT begin work for the quality of the community. That is why this is about an ecology of differences as we are dependent on the opening paralysis which is linked with a refusal of empathy and involvement. And this applies to many spheres. It is necessary to create an ecology of cancer outside the threshold medical of treatment. People do not have to worry about dying as a state in which dejected waiting dominates. The ecology of dying does not have to be focused on the end of life but on constant use and not giving up (*fighter or quitter*) as part of caring for adding sense to being a human as a tragic creature.

The question regarding the functioning of the healthcare systems in the face of the illusion of many repair programs becomes more dramatic. We know that the care system may be *self-perpetuating* unproductively absorbing any amount of measures like a bottomless pit, showing its own illusory and irrational nature, dropping cases really needing help. Health as a welfare cannot be rigidly fixed in clinical procedures and

pharmacological practices, needing a philosophy of life which would give sense to existence even in state pushing one into a feeling of despair. It is necessary to care in some way for the condition of the state against reductive determinants in healthcare. The ecological *battle against the bottle* requires a wide spiritual perspective and alternative means of giving sense to one's life. Disease in itself is not enough of a pretext to cure oneself by force or invasive interventions supporting life. The ecology of mind must stand against traps arising from the self-destructive defence mechanisms of socialization.

The importance of an aesthetic change needs to be appreciated even in order to allow for a new strategy of life, as being on the road; as has been explained by Zygmunt Bauman, is not without significance for communities and communicating with them if their dominating mentality is an attitude of the tourist who buys himself pleasures, or a traveller who cannot be ordered around, or a wanderer looking to escape from everyday life – all of them do not want to be responsible for life seen as a series of episodes and a fragmentation of experience. In this assumption there is no ecological case to acquire information changing existential ideas into caring about the community, when indifference dominates, nor where we become hostages of hastiness and cynicism, together getting rid of the reflection which delays superficial choices.

It is becoming necessary to inspire a new perception of the world in education through new media and social institutions. We must see the dangers on a mass scale, although this cannot be automatically comprehend as persuasively speaking to the imagination. Therapeutic and pedagogical questions need to be supplemented by a generation of new concerns also outside the typical defence mechanisms, spontaneous and not quite reflective. The uncomfortable question about sustainable development is being publicized: how many more people can Earth support and feed (the calculations vary from several hundred million to 50 billion, and we are at 8). We also need to answer what kind of lifestyle globally increases this number and which one limits it – as, for example, destroying the environment reduces the survival potential of civilization. The practice of creative improvisation can be positive but it is inscribed into unconscious dangers. Acting blind creates new dangers. We are constantly letting the evil jinn out of the bottle. Let repeat this at the end: Ecology of the spirit is an imperative of the moment!

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