healer, the teacher, and other professionals that harkens back to the philia that has been so central to Illich's life and work. If my analytic mentor is available personally day and night, if, in following him, my own clinic telephone rings evenings in my kitchen, it is because such practices are rests of an exemplary relationship between I and Thou tracing its origin back thousands of years. Here and there such actions endure even in this age of dense systems. Developing an eye to see these rests, and attempting to keep them alive in a toxic age, are perhaps the most important tasks of the present time.

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NOTES

2. Ivan Illich, H₂O and the Waters of Forgetfulness: Reflections on the Historicity of "Stuff" (Dallas, TX: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1985).
5. Ibid., pp. 85, 86.
6. See Ivan Illich, Gender (New York: Pantheon, 1982).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Hospitality Cannot Be a Challenge

Alfons Gajrigs

Challenge is a term often used in our times to characterize such issues as unemployment, education, health, development, democracy, world peace, or sustainability. But nothing is a provocation per se; there must be someone who feels offended or simply worked up: the person who confronts reality as if it were a threat. Nowadays this happens in public as much as in private. World peace, for instance, may appear as challenging as one's internal tranquillity. The result is that not only politicians, but teachers, psychotherapists, and even clergy speak about challenges. This continual naming must be more than self-interested promotion or educational rhetoric.

My thesis is simple: As long as we continue proposing the main issues of our time as challenges, offenses, or crises against which we have to test our strength, we will persist in making the same mistakes that gave rise to the problems in the first place. The intensified use of industrial tools is, for instance, largely supported by an ethos or ethical norm for which every problem, if not reality itself, is a challenge. People who feel offended or provoked vie with reality. Their main objective is to overcome their anger and display their powers. This kind of fear will hardly permit them to be fully aware of the matters at hand.

It is not difficult for technology to follow the logic of challenge. Its great efficiency in shaping reality on a grand scale is admitted by all, but this very power tends to obstruct the ability to recognize its limitations, to appreciate the point beyond which its transformations cease to promote habitable living space or truly human relations. Obligatory schooling, hospitalized medicine, a network of freeways, or long-distance communications may be technological challenges, but learning, friendship, or the discovery of another culture is not. In these actions there is something unforeseen that depends on the relation itself. This is the very sphere of the human, which a technological modus operandi, by its nature, is incapable of recognizing.
In Western and many other cultures, during the centuries of antiquity and the Middle Ages, the measure of the human was the universe conceived as an ordered, beautiful whole, changing but in a regular manner and, in any case, balanced and coherent. The Greeks called this a "kosmos" precisely because its order was good, beautiful, and exemplary. The maxims of ancient sages, métron áriston (the best is the measure) or médon ágmen (nothing in excess), were not only simple proverbs of common sense, but a clear and concise expression of the ancient conception of the universe. Thus, one ought to behave according to the measure the very universe gives us. This good law, eunomía, is a characteristic common to premodern societies. For Raimundo Panikkar,

Eunomía supposes a certain agreement that there is a just and good order, a nomos, rite, dharma, tao, torah, one law. Ultimately, there is a transcends, a God, under whatever name, who is above us and to whom we have access if we follow or recognize this same order.7

We thus speak of societies that Louis Dumont calls "holistic," in which all understand themselves because of the place they occupy in the whole. The world, in a physical, metaphysical, religious, and moral sense, is understood in terms of balance. This world is under a principle or law—internal and external—inexorably capable of standing firm on its own. When humans transgress the order that holds the cosmos together, they commit a sin of pride, and the cosmic law itself renders justice by returning them to their place. Greek tragedy is a public reflection on the limits of action in a new political, juridical, and religious regime, such as that of the polis (city).7 Aeschylus, in The Persians, has the ghost of Darius explain the defeat of Xerxes by saying that,

In the blind arrogance of childish thought,
He dreamed that he could chain, as men chain slaves,
The holy haste of Hellespontine waves,
God's flowing Bosporus,

attempting to build a bridge for his army.8 This idea resounds distinctly in each ancient thinker.

Almost 2000 years later at the gate of hell, Dante finds an inscription that gives an explanation for the origin of the place:

Justice moved my High Maker; Divine Power made me,
Wisdom Supreme and Primal Love.9

According to C.S. Lewis, one must keep in mind this total conception of the universe, both ordered and ordering, in order to understand literature almost up to the end of the modern era.10 The Summa theologiae, the cathedral at Chartres, and The Divine Comedy express, each in its own way, the coherence of knowledge, which is nothing else than the coherence of reality as understood by premodern peoples. The heavens and human customs are described, natural phenomena are
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An intelligence, a sense of, I call it, "cognitive." These are the functions of the brain that enable us to interpret and understand the world around us. In doing so, we are able to make sense of the information we receive and make decisions based on that information. This process is not always straightforward, and it can be influenced by a variety of factors, including our biases, emotions, and expectations.

Understanding and interpreting the world around us is a complex process that involves the interaction of many different brain regions. The brain is made up of billions of neurons, each of which can communicate with thousands of others. These neurons work together to process information and generate the complex patterns of activity that underlie our thoughts, feelings, and actions.

To read a text, we first need to decode the meaning of the words and sentences. This involves breaking down the words into smaller units, such as syllables and phonemes, and then mapping those units onto their corresponding meanings. We then use our knowledge of grammar and syntax to understand the relationships between the words and how they are arranged in the sentence.

Once we have decoded the meaning of the text, we can then use our own experiences and knowledge to interpret it. This process involves assigning meaning to the words and sentences, and then using that meaning to understand the overall message of the text. We may also use our own emotions and biases to influence our interpretation of the text.

In summary, understanding and interpreting the world around us is a complex process that involves the interaction of many different brain regions. To read a text, we first need to decode the meaning of the words and sentences, and then use our own experiences and knowledge to interpret it. This process is not always straightforward, and it can be influenced by a variety of factors, including our biases, emotions, and expectations.
planet is paradoxically a culture in crisis. Environmental and social degradation, institutional collapse, and unsustainable growth give proof of this. But Illich’s analyses and proposals are not the same as others. His thought is rooted in certain fundamental insights of the Western tradition, and he criticizes, on the basis of these very propositions, their perversions. Hence, his analyses cannot be incorporated, tout court, into the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In my opinion, Illich would subscribe in large part to the observations Allan Bloom makes with regard to those who not only question the virtues of the Western tradition, but consider them a dead issue.16

Though the themes of Illich’s work are diverse, they include three characteristics that give it unity: a naturalist, a historicist, and an ethical component. All three are present in his early books, but there is a progressive emphasis of the historicist and ethical in the later writings.

In his analysis of the principal industrial tools and the book on conviviality, I think the naturalist element predominates. There is a natural scale beyond which tools are counterproductive and generate all kinds of harmful effects: environmental, social, and psychological.17 In this first group of works, mythology is no shallow rhetorical device. The reference to Prometheus and Epimetheus in Deschooling Society,18 or to the Greek Nemesis in Medical Nemesis,19 is inspired by a classical vision of the cosmos, ordered and ordering. The human task consists of imitating and conserving this fragile balance in the community.

The historicist element is also present in this first group of works. Illich has always known how to defend his hypothesis with historical and cultural expositions. A reading of chapter 8 in Medical Nemesis, with its brief history of death, will confirm this. However, in later books such as Shadow Work, Gender, H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness, ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind, or in his study of reading in Hugh of St. Victor, In the Vineyard of the Text, as well as in the essays from the 1980s collected in In the Mirror of the Past, historicist argumentation comes to the fore.20 None of our beliefs is natural or invariant; all of them arise from a process of social construction and play a fundamental role in our perception. They often make us resign ourselves to what is intolerable, or they are a genuine obstacle when we try to name it. The historian raises doubts about this pattern of thought by showing its course of formation. There is no need for Illich to speak of the future or to make proposals. His principal achievement has been to clear the field so that a new art of living can flourish. He ends Gender with,

I have no strategy to offer. I refuse to speculate on the probabilities of any cure. I shall not allow the shadow of the future to fall on the concepts with which I try to grasp what is and what has been. As the ascetic and the poet meditate on death and thus gratefully enjoy the exquisite aliveness of the present, so we must face the sad loss of gender. I strongly suspect that a contemporary art of living can be recovered, so long as our austere and clear-sighted acceptance of the double ghetto of economic neuters then moves us to renounce the comforts of economic sex.21

Finally, though the ethical element is highlighted in his latest writings, the two others do not disappear. In his essays on askesis, philia, and “the gaze,” Illich revives virtue in the classical sense and points out how the acquisition of this interior habit, the fruit of a discipline that has integrated intellect and the sense appetites, is almost impossible when tools have been transformed into a system. With this change, consciousness is dissolved, and workers begin to form part of the technological complex as one of its components and, as such, they become objects of efficiency criteria, thereby losing their moral autonomy.22

Thus, the fundamental leitmotiv of Illich’s thought has not varied. As a philosopher of technology, an analyst of institutions, and a historian, Illich has always spoken of virtue as a moral custom or style. At the end of the introduction to Tools for Conviviality, he recovers austerity as ethos:

“Austerity,” which says something about people, has also been degraded and has acquired a bitter taste, while for Aristotle or Aquinas it marked the foundation of friendship. . . . [Aquinas] defines “austerity” as a virtue which does not exclude all enjoyment, but only those which are distracting from or destructive of personal relatedness. For Thomas “austerity” is a complementary part of a more embracing virtue, which he calls friendship or joyfulness. It is the fruit of an apprehension that things or tools could destroy rather than enhance eunomia (or graceful playfulness) in personal relations.23

In one of his speeches, Illich explains his relation to philosophy. Though he speaks of the discipline as an ancilla (handmaiden), we can see that he deems her a medicine for threats endangering the twofold fundamental intuitions of Western culture—Logos (reason) and charitas (love). Logos postulates an intelligible cosmos and the human capacity to connect with it. Charitas points toward the inherent dignity of all human beings and their ability to live appropriately with respect and love. The West is an outcome of the conflict-synthesized symbiosis of these universals from Athens and Jerusalem, each of which is under attack by a kind of reductionism. Reductionism in reason takes the form a belief that the reality of concrete beings can be fully grasped by means of increasingly abstract formulas. With charity the threat is to reduce virtue to the practices of large and powerful social institutions.24

The Western mind has allowed itself to be seduced by an arrogant confidence in the human ability to think and love. Greek thought and the Gospel have been perverted by the imagination of a universal without a singular, an intelligence without emotion, and a society in which a person has no face. For Illich, the present is the horror that has been born out of inextricable but fragile gifts. To protect these gifts, one must respect certain impassable limits. Today, however, a limit is not considered a symbol of protection, but one of provocation. Human pride grew, always challenging the
limits of reality. Illich directly associates pride with the modern planning of systems. The maxim "Corruptio optimi quae est pessima" (The corruption of the best is the worst), according to Illich, is the key to a history of the West. But such a vision of history may lead to divergent interpretations.

We may perceive the spirit of an age or culture as an expression of the mystery of evil while forgetting that our criticism rests on criteria that this very tradition has given us. Thus, schools, medicine, and modern transportation are questioned because they are discriminatory. The ideal of justice and social equality, valid for every person, independently of economic status, cultural origin, or gender, is an ideal that was spread with Christianity, and has been more firmly established in the West during recent centuries. Contemporary institutions were born of the same cosmic vision that produced the great massacres of the twentieth century. The bureaucratic processes associated with professional teachers, physicians, and urban planners are often humiliating, devious, expensive, and inefficient, but the systems arose or have been legitimated by a political will concerning justice that appears unchangeable.

The problem, however, is that modern institutions are tools that contradict their ends. This is another of Illich's teachings. Schools are the first obstacle to learning, just as automobiles are to accessibility and social mobility. Medicalized health care and industrial architecture, in their turn, wound personal dignity and lessen our capacity to live with pain, death, and friendship. These services, aside from being counterproductive, increase inequality rather than alleviate it and convert poverty into misery by depriving the poor of those means that their imaginativeness had utilized for subsistence; that is, services constitute radical monopolies.

Illich revealed the ideology behind modern institutions: People are, by definition, incompetent and needy beings. Modern systems assume that people will find their happiness in the consumption of mass-produced articles. If this is indeed a perversion of the ideal of equality, the ideal, nevertheless, continues in force. A society, therefore, that professes the right of all its members to lead a dignified life must consider whether the indiscriminate growth of modern systems of management and consumption is the best way to respect and promote the exercise of this right.

Read in this way, Illich's work does not condemn the fundamental insights of Western civilization, including their universalism. Instead, he may be interpreted as formulating a paradox worthy of G.K. Chesterton. Only one form of life is universalizable—that which gives priority to the singular sphere of the vernacular. The contemporary form of life in the West is maintained at the cost of rising and irreversible social differences; it is in no way universalizable. From this, one sees not only its ecological absurdity but also its moral illegitimacy. Whether all forms of the vernacular are equally acceptable is another issue. Illich thus aims to construct a debate about which institutions actually serve to achieve the emancipatory ideals that have been taking shape in the course of Western history.

Illich provides a key to understanding this history by placing at the base of our dreams the institutions the Gospel and its different interpretations. However, his vision of history as an expanding perversion of the Gospel message could lead to a kind of catastrophism in which there would be no other choice but to renounce the world. The temptation in this case would be to substitute a vernacular world for the market and state. But a renunciation of this kind would be fictitious. The world in which we move seems to be inseparable from the market and management. As Teodor Shanin observes, "[T]he pretense of many modern intellectuals to long for the vernacular should not deceive us. Nine-tenths of those who say this choose to live in a setting that is nine-tenths anti-vernacular in all its characteristics."

The question is up to what point can a vernacular mode exist without the public sphere? The public sector and huge institutions are not necessarily incompatible with face-to-face relations. They are distinct spheres, but they could very well be complementary. A network of libraries, streetcars, roads, telephones, or computers would exceed the possibilities of one community. As André Gorz points out, Illich's analyses accentuate the autonomous sphere, the sphere of personal and community relations that can fill up one's life, but they do not imply a rejection of the heteronomous sphere, that of the market and state. The problem is which sphere is at the service of the other. What is needed is imagination and daring to take on these institutions so that rather than suffocating the vernacular world, just tolerating it on the margins, they might even promote it. Or perhaps it would be enough to keep one's eyes open, as Gustavo Esteva does in his descriptions of the underground politics in Mexican communities of ordinary people.

Such a radical renunciation of that which overpowers the vernacular is also supported by Jacques Ellul's analysis of the power of modern technique. Certainly tools include an ideology. Technique transformed into a powerful ideology has metastasized the Western world into a "technicist" society. There is no aspect of human life that has not been affected by this conversion. Yet Ellul's view is so totalizing that a reader may wind up seeing any technological tool as a principle of evil itself. It is more intelligent to distinguish the diversity of elements that compose a historic period, and search in the diversity for clues to move forward. We cannot ignore science, industry, the market, or the state—or cavalierly dismiss them. Rejecting technological absolutism we would simply pass over into an absolutism of the vernacular. We are faced with elements that it is difficult to conceive as other than contraries: the spheres of autonomy and heteronomy, community and society, the vernacular and the market or the state. To reject any of these would be as moot as it would be naive. In fact, if the reading of Illich turns out to be stimulating, it is in part because of his capacity to combine a conservative tradition with revolutionary points of view without rejecting any of the contraries.

Finally, to attribute to Illich a vision of history as catastrophic would be to fail to appreciate his sense of humor. Toward the end of the 1970s, although none of my
circle of readers knew Illich personally, having seen his photograph on the Barral and Moritz editions of his books or in some magazine, we were struck by his affable, amusing, and even jocular appearance. Illich was practically the only intellectual who wore a smile. Moreover, it was not a prefabricated, advertising smile, but the smile of a person who could take the course of history with a sense of humor. The preface to his first collection of essays reveals this humor with freshness:

Institutions create certainties, and when they are taken seriously, they deaden the heart and enchain the imagination. I trust that each affirmation of mine, irate or passionate, shrewd or naive, will also produce a smile and, with it, a new freedom, however costly its price.32

Is this smile, virtuous and tender, that of a Christian? In the final analysis, the Christian knows that despite all the horror and nostalgia, the mystery of evil has been illuminated.

HOSPITALITY AS PARADIGM

Though Illich has exposed the contradictions involved in a technological culture, I do not think he presents these contradictions as a challenge. This would be precisely the way of technological ideology, to incite the talented to surpass the limits that shape reality. Reality always appears in concrete and limited forms. Unrestrained people dream of excelling by always going further. Development zeal designs its tools to conquer a challenge. This is the sense of the technological imperative: all that can be done must be done. In this struggle modern persons put themselves to the test by measuring themselves. But the ethos of challenge turns us into automatic transgressors of limits.

There must be antecedents of this ethos of challenge, but it is difficult to find them in the moral systems of the ancients. When we set up a task, be it theoretical or practical, as a challenge, we are not moved by desire for survival, or by the Epicurean search for pleasure, or by the Stoic sense of duty, even less by Christian charity that, although it includes something of both pleasure and duty, is born of a very different experience. Therefore, it makes no sense to read Illich as a person who formulates challenges for our times. All his work is full of references to limits. He speaks of them as a frontier separating the convivial tool from the superefficient, or as the mark that indicates successive transformations of space, water, text, conscience, or of relations between the genders. But limit has a positive sense in his writings: it is the condition of the possibility of hospitality. In Illich, limit is a threshold and, as such, the boundary that separates inhospitable terrain from the inhabitable, rain and storm from shelter. Without this mark, the gesture that best defines humans would not be possible: a welcoming reception.

Thus, we stand before a philosophy of hospitality. If this philosophy appears provocative, that is because it renounces every kind of arrogance. Missionaries, experts, planners, promoters of development or democracy, for all their goodwill, are still figures of a perverted charity. Here one sees the terrible danger in every political proposal that promises salvation. Before the arrogance of the technician, Illich counters with the humility of the guest. The good guest is one who listens well and learns the silence of a language, who travels to a land whose culture is different but who makes friends there, and the suffering one who accepts help, the person who comes in from the cold, who allows the mystery of the other gender to survive in the space he or she occupies, and in the chores of subsistence. In a certain sense, each of Illich's books may be read as an attempt to recover the blessings of such receptivity in some institutional domain.

The limits he points out in his works are thresholds that need not be transgressed. The question is one of not abandoning human space. Hospitality cannot be relegated to specialists, and a society that indiscriminately places its old folks, its sick, its young people, or its marginals in the hands of professionals is renouncing hospitality. Deep down in his texts, Illich cherishes the hope that people may once again cross the threshold and live in this space where it is possible to look at another face to face. It is difficult here to speak of challenges. It seems absurd to imagine a guest and a host challenging each other to live together under the same roof. If this is no way to talk of hospitality, what then is the proper language?

The singularity of Illich's thought appears here: Although always mindful of his days as a priest in a Puerto Rican parish in New York, he has not supported his positions with the authority of sacred texts, nor has he directed himself specifically to a community of believers. It is not in the guise of a preacher that he speaks of hospitality, but with the rigor of a social scientist. In this sense his work poses the question of what extent technology and hospitality are complementary contraries. This meditation, however urgent and necessary it may be, is not a challenge; it must be understood not from the point of view of technology but of hospitality.

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NOTES

This chapter was translated from the Spanish by Joseph Doshner.
12. Pascal, Pensées, Br. 793; La. 308; Ch. 829, in Oeuvres Complètes (Gallimard, Col. La Pléiade, 1991).
15. José Antonio Martina, Elogio y refutación del ingenio (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1992); and José Antonio Martina, El misterio de la voluntad perdida (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1997).