

Letter to the End-of-the-World Generation

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It is in solidarity with you who today view the adult world with apprehension and wonder about the future that I write this text. I ask for your permission to offer my experience as a history teacher and researcher on scenarios for the future, which led me to write the book *Auroville, 2046: After the end of one world*. I am 55 years old, have two children who are young adults, and am witnessing the intense awareness among youth about what awaits us long before they reach my age. The testimonies are touching, and the coronavirus pandemic was an accelerant of this view. If a virus can turn the world upside-down like it did, imagine the scale of damage wrought by the tragedies that scientists have said will come to pass, such as climate change.

I want to start by sharing a visionary episode that happened to a young and brilliant student twenty years ago, who wrote under my supervision a monograph about the urban development of the small alternative community of Capão in the Chapada Diamantina, Brazil. His dedicated and competent work earned him a glowing approval from the jury of the urbanism course at the State University of Bahia. As usual, the supervisor embraced the student, welcoming him to the world of researchers, which he was preparing to enter with evident talent. When I asked him about his plans about a possible master's degree, he surprised me by saying he would live in Capão and probably be a tour guide. Astonished, I told him that he was so intelligent and talented that he should become a teacher, to which he replied with something like, "Dear professor, if I am indeed that smart, I cannot arrange my life to serve this world in decay."

This episode touched me because, although at the time I was leading a large program to encourage conscious consumption in the Brazilian university environment, I had no such clarity about the future. I will therefore approach the subject of the future of young people on the basis of the path of this young student, who is today living a simple and happy life in Capão. If you allow me one piece of advice to begin with, I will say: Do not plan careers and achievements tied to the world as it is—or was, before the pandemic—because it will soon no longer exist, and this choice will not be beneficial for you, nor for life as a whole.

Dealing with the *end of a world* is not an easy task, but I can assure you that if the prospects are gloomy, it is also possible to see light at the end of the tunnel. As the sages of old remind us, after every night there always comes a dawn. If the watchwords of the near future are likely to be *destruction* and *uncertainty*, they will also be joined by *resilience* and *creativity*. When barbarism knocks at the door, we will be forced to increase our resilience and regenerate what is being damaged, and in the face of great imbalance, only cooperation can enable us to be reborn as a civilization. *Cooperation* will also be a watchword of the future, and this is certainly promising, but it will require courage and determination. And it will also call for the development of quintessentially feminine traits, such as caring and acceptance, that build networks of affection, friendships, family, and solidarity with the human family and nature.

Despite the catastrophes that are implicit in the idea of the end-of-the-world generation, this can also be seen as a great liberation for the world's youth. They will be the first generation that will not have to adapt to the world of their parents, a dull option for any young person with imagination. And so many have had their lives and professional careers guided by convenience—whether from the market, with the aim of working where one potentially earns more money, or from prestige, which means following in the family footsteps in order to inherit respect, privileged conditions, and also high remuneration.

These old paths where young people once projected their futures have often resulted in frustrated expectations and unhappiness owing to the betrayal of their individual talents. In any case, the expectation of money and prestige has always been for the few, leaving the over-

whelming majority frustrated and unhappy. Now money and prestige have become a chimera accessible perhaps only to a very few young people from families that have managed to save their fortunes despite all the obstacles that they have had to face and thus to finance the *prosperity* of another generation. Throughout history, many young people have had to forsake their talents—not to mention their sexual choices, their artistic inclinations, and their most creative dreams—in order to integrate into their home community. Today, because of the impact of uncertainty, they tend to be freer to choose their paths.

The dreams of *success*, of *successful careers*, of enrichment and prestige, have been stimulated by the capitalist culture that has built the disaster we are witnessing. The market model in which profit is the sole objective is not resilient, especially during such transformative times. In the radical change that the future will surely bring, it is foolish to waste the intelligence and talent of youth on traditional perspectives. In a world to be rebuilt, all the energy and creativity of the young will be very welcome, especially if they accept the future as being uncertain and therefore develop resilience—that ability to accommodate the shocks of life by focusing on the most important things in one's existence: learning, love, a sense of wholeness, and the joys of living and socializing.

Most likely, prosperity will be conceived of differently in the future. It will be much more linked to the idea of being able to recover nature and renew human relationships on a sustainable basis. Producing healthy food, clean water, clean air; reinvigorating soils and forests; and recreating biodiversity—the world's great wealth—will be much more prestigious skills in the future. Building solid human relationships in solidarity with people near and far will be another prestigious skill. Being an artist, bringing to the world more fantasy, unexpected possibilities, deep explorations of the soul ... all of this will be precious and much more valued, giving youth more reasons to rebel, as they have always done, but bringing a new legitimacy: claiming to affirm their service to the world when they do what their soul asks them to do.

The word *uncertainty* will appear much more frequently in our future lives, and we will finally learn how much the desire to control the

uncertain is an illusion. It is better to be open to the unforeseen and make the best of it. When systems become destabilized, especially the Earth's natural system, predictions will be more difficult, even with all our technological advances. I thus move on to a second piece of advice, if you will indulge me: I strongly recommend that young people develop their intuition, this human ability that is considered to be feminine, so little used, and even despised. Intuition is a kind of intimate vision, made possible when mind and heart are in tune. It involves body and soul, and with intuition it is possible to choose the best path in the face of fear, uncertainty, and doubt. This ability can be developed through daily exercises when the mind is calmed and other wisdom is put at our service. It will be an important factor in increasing resilience and the serenity needed to listen to greater wisdom in the face of adversity and opportunity. Intuition is also a great friend of creativity and thus of art, science, and invention.

A great potentiality of the future can already be experienced today: learning over the Internet, taking advantage of the spirit of cooperation that reigns there and that is natural in human beings. This spirit of cooperation is widely practiced by many alternative communities. Today, these groupings, of which ecovillages are a shining example, are already engaged in various win-win economic modes of sharing and redistribution; in sustainable ways of dealing with nature to produce food and forests; in integrative modes of education and health that draw on the innate wisdom of children and our bodies to learn and stay healthy; in collaborative practices of self-knowledge that rely on the idea of transforming oneself to transform the world; in the democratic governance of local collectives that inspire transformations on larger scales; in the moderation of consumption required by the zero-waste imperative; in collaborative and ecological open-source technologies, creative commons, and the like.

It is highly likely that in the future there will be many shortages of what was once common as a result of the succession of predictable crises of food, water, and fuel, the volatility of money, restrictions on mobility, and so on. In this case, what was abundant and harmful will fortunately gradually run out: oil, plastics, disposables, waste, superfi-

ciality, exacerbated competition, senseless consumption. We will open our eyes to see abundance where it was once invisible. All the possibilities of recycling that transform waste into useful objects will be valued in this future world where dumps and landfills are treasures. And so, what was little valued by the market, what yields little or no money but brings meaning to life, will become essential: restoring broken objects, the arts in general, working with the soil, and simple handmade stuff. Also essential will be that which does not bring any material wealth: contemplation, quietude, deliberate idleness, pleasant and joyful interaction among friends.

Think, dear young people, of the appealing world that may be coming into existence—a world in which the “inner technologies” of Mirra Alfassa’s dream for the most important ecovillage, Auroville, become a way forward. The “Mother” of Auroville said that a time would come when we would harmonize our external achievements—the incredible technologies invented by humankind to deal with the outer world—with inner technologies, ingenious and sensitive ways of dealing with our interior worlds. This immense universe that is inside each one of us is interconnected with others and can evolve. This is what Gustav Jung told us in his concept of the collective unconscious, as Rupert Sheldrake tells us today in his concept of morphogenetic fields, or as the ancestral wisdoms have always told us. Evolution moves us towards more lovingkindness, and human history itself proves this if we follow the historical evolution of the idea of the right to a joyful life, for example.

You, the youth of today, can help humanity to make great strides in the direction of lovingkindness. I invite you, dear youth, to open your eyes to see people and communities that have already been living post-capitalism for years and even decades. They bet on learning to live together, as the *Convivialist Manifestos* of our time invite us to do. In fact, these communities have only updated the concepts that were present in the ways of life of the original cultures that were suffocated by colonialism. They understood that harmony between us and the Earth, between ourselves and others, and between the various parts of ourselves—body, soul, heart, and mind—is the only way we can survive together and thrive subjectively and materially. And to be happy and to allow others

to be happy too. The world is failing but also starting over, and you will make that history by overcoming not only capitalism but patriarchy too.

Where you are is also going to be especially important for the opportunities that are available to you. Until now big cities and megacities have been the loci of those opportunities, but they are heavy and dependent constructs with extremely low resilience and unsustainable. They are increasingly expensive, polluted, congested, violent, and nothing on the horizon points to this getting better. On the contrary. Medium and small cities, ecovillages, life in the countryside all offer greater resilience to environmental, economic, social, political problems. Having a green belt around a city offers easier access to food, having a government in reach favors democracy, having families and friends nearby favors cooperation, and neighborhood life is much more vibrant in smaller urban spaces.

An economy of proximity is more solid. The shorter circuits, so to speak, strengthen the local economy and distribute income. For this very reason, there will be a tendency toward decentralization even in large cities. With the pandemic and the acceleration of remote work, via digital technologies, millions of people have left the cities and settled in quieter places while maintaining their ability to work and interact. When they had to remain isolated at home, people took much more advantage of local commerce and neighborhood relations. All this is already impacting the future, showing that there are ways out when the accumulation of crises is transforming megacities into places with many more problems than opportunities.

This scarcity of what was abundant and this abundance of what was unexpectedly useful tends to be a feature of the future. As an example, let's think about food and look at something that is already a trend among the most innovative youth: the incredible edibles. You know that hardy little plant that is just around the corner, growing without care? It could be an incredibly tasty, very nutritious edible. When science tells us that climate change will make it increasingly difficult to continue growing the foods we are used to in the places where they have always been grown, this can open our eyes to other nutritious possibilities. This is what is happening in many parts of India today with rice, the na-

tional food. Many experiments are being done to replace it with millet, a much more nutritious and climate-resilient grain that requires much less water and provides much more nutrients than rice. Yet it was once despised.

It is when catastrophe becomes anastrophe, reconstruction, that each young person can find the joy in doing what they love and thus serving the world—without choosing a career for prestige and money, as has been done for generations, and without making any other life choices of any kind under the crushing weight of past generations, just being inspired by what they did that you admire and honor. You will be the gardeners of tomorrow, who know how to replenish, who deal with conflicts using your heart and not your bile, who realize that each individual gesture builds the collective world, that your internal world is reflected in the external world. And you will task yourselves with doing the best for yourselves, doing the best for the world. I trust you, and I also wish you good luck. We are in this together.

