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PROLOGUE

Throughout the 20th century and in the first decades of the 21st, the decline of the West has intensified. The crisis in which it finds itself is not merely economic and ideological, but is based on the deepening weakness of its cultural foundations: it is a crisis of spirit. A crisis that walks on "dove's feet," silent but restless. If we listen to it with a little delay, it also reveals a devastating phenomenon: spiritual deprivation has also become a pathogen whose effects spread throughout the entire fabric of society. We must dare to say it without hesitation: the West is sick.

It is not surprising that a new malaise in culture is spreading clandestinely, like a confused and constant rumor that ends up not being heard in our world of dizzying movements, and that bursts forth with clarity only at precise moments, especially low ones. These statements could summarize the theses to which, dear reader, the research offered here is committed.

The decline of the West does not consist in the decadence of a supposed regulative ideal that lay hidden in a primordial and complete origin, but in the darkening of its spiritual lucidity, which possesses neither a primal or inaugural alpha nor a distant omega towards which it is directed. Its spiritual lucidity has emitted scattered and heterogeneous flashes, but always within the bosom of a becoming without a determining causal beginning or teleological end. In the present, these fragile but proliferating flashes are being extinguished by an internal inertia that threatens to lead them into a prolonged night.

When we say "spiritual lucidity," we are not referring to a mystical instance, but to the richness and liveliness of culture, that fertile ground in which understandings of the world, interpretations of reality, ways of life, and evaluative expectations grow. In the early stages of the present century, it is widely said that the West has been overtaken by an economic crisis, accompanied by the yoke of oppressive political neoliberalism. While this diagnosis is true, it is, however, short-sighted, narrow, and, in that sense, one-sided.

Because the crisis is, more profoundly, one of spirit. It is the cultural musculature of the West that has been entering, for more than a century, into a critical state of decay. On top of this—which is the exhaustion of the forces that energize the entire community—economic and ideological miseries thrive. But, as the cultural flow is qualitative and subterranean, it remains invisible and highlights by contrast the visibility of other more superficial declines, which monopolize attention and hijack both critical analysis and transgressive praxis.

The reader should not interpret this understanding of what is happening as reductionist. The author does not believe that the sociopolitical space is merely a superficial expression of the cultural background. He has therefore endeavored to show that both are sides of the same coin, the obverse and reverse of the same discourse, albeit disjointed and heterogeneous. The evolution of culture and socio-political evolution are linked in a discordant unity, which allows for reciprocal influence. However, the spiritual crisis of culture, the dynamics of its decline, has a significant advantage over that which undermines the social and political topology. Therefore, no urgent solution in this second area will extract us from the destitution of the first. A stereoscopic view is needed, capable of illuminating both in their interpenetration, as well as the discrepancy that exists between them. Moreover, this is the object of study of a *Grand Politics*, aimed at examining the invisible in the visible and which is the inescapable companion of a politics of the patently presentable.

The decline of the West is rooted, first and foremost, in its cultural background. But what does culture mean and what does its decline consist of? Answering the first of these questions is the task of the first part of this book. In contrast to anthropocentric perspectives, the author understands culture as the most recent stratum of the entire *physis* that generates the

world, from stone to the collective human, passing through the life of the lark. If the term "reality" must be used, it is necessary to redefine its most traditional meaning. The real is not a structurally ordered whole founded on solid and stable ground. The real is, paradoxical as it may seem, the forging of reality by the power of a self-creating genesis that runs through it. That is why culture possesses its own wildness, which is rooted in the power of a self-creating genesis that runs through it.

The real is, paradoxical as it may seem, the forging of reality by the power of a self-creating genesis that runs through it. For this reason, culture possesses its own wild nature, which has its roots in *natura naturans*. And that is also why its opposite is understood here as *societas socians*. The generative force, in all the breadth of *physis*, does not follow the deterministic pattern of legality. It proceeds by *chaosmosis*, a term which, according to the author's conviction, is destined to shape a new paradigm of thought, now emerging in all fields of knowledge. A chaosmotic generation is the self-transfiguring becoming of problematic plexuses, that is, of differential relationships between heterogeneous dynamisms, from whose chaos emerges an order that is always self-altering and governed by a protean rule, emerging at every step.

In the stratum of culture, this becoming proceeds, not by supplying inherent deficiencies, but by exuberance of power and vital richness. Restricting the movement of culture and its sociopolitical reverse to the pursuit of material survival is to commit an error that a certain social Darwinism propagates in our day. Sociocultural becoming is driven by the increase in powers and possibilities, that is, by the aspiration for a more prolific life, by the longing for life to be more life, by "survival" (*super-vivencia*), in short. And in its course we witness the protean, transmutant self-creation of human space.

Such self-creation has its roots in that which takes place in nature as a whole, as an emerging force, that is, as *physis* or *natura naturans*, whose impetus is not based, in all its depth, on a primary foundation or on the distant attraction exerted by a *telos*. It is its own end and its own means, on a path without end, infinite in principle. We address its general texture, from the physical to the human, in the second chapter. In the stratum of human sociocultural life, it can be analyzed from different points of view, among which we have highlighted two. On the one hand, the tension between community and people, which we explore in the first chapter because it can, at the same time, introduce the reader to the conception we are developing. On the other hand, there is the tension between *societas socians* and cultural *physis*, the subject of the third chapter.

It is in the second part that we attempt to discern the meaning of Western decline. The central thesis, which we unfold in the fourth chapter, after this long journey, dictates that this decline consists of a sociocultural genesis that turns against itself, offering the terrifying spectacle of what we have called *autophagic genesis*. A genesis that, in its immanent dynamism, paradoxically devours its own powers. Such is the meaning we give to the disease of the West. This is not produced by anomalies with respect to a supposed state of health or normality. The disease is the aporetic process by which life, due to its own movement, falters and turns against itself. It is autophagic and not autoimmune, since it is not caused by the revolt of its defenses against itself (culture has no exterior and does not defend itself against any pathogen), as some today maintain. Its cause lies in a counter-genetic reversal of its own dynamic forces.

Since autophagic genesis is the agent of Western disease, it gives rise to a multitude of pathologies of civilization, that is, to processes, also autophagic, by which the Western community, considered in a supra-individual way (as a whole greater than the sum of its parts), blinds its qualitative growth in the very act of propelling it. The disease of the West, thus considered, has as its condition its crisis, which we understand as *agenesis*, an inability to

engender or create. Autophagic aporia is the key to the new malaise in culture, which spreads clandestinely, managed privately, in a civilization that imposes happiness by decree.

To clarify its meaning, we have been forced, in this same fourth chapter, to offer a theory of the collective psyche, a theory in which the author has perhaps taken too many risks, but which is left to the reader's judgment. In the fifth chapter, we have endeavored to bring to light specific figures of the crisis and illness of the West, in which interdisciplinary incursions into sociology, psychopathology, anthropology, and political philosophy intersect. Finally, in chapter six, the author has explored possible ways out of Western decline, in a synthetic and sketchy way, as a rigorous study would require an entire treatise. Although only outlined in general terms, the author has included them because he did not want to leave this research without proposals for a possible dawn. In the decline of the West, glimmers of dawn can also be seen.

The book is closely related to the author's previous work, *Erratic Being: A Critical Ontology of Society*, which will be referred to as a starting point in the first chapter. The ontology defended in the 2009 text had to assert itself in the reticular context of contemporary philosophy. For this reason, it focused its sights on justifying the very starting point of a critical ontology. The assumptions of this ontology, which were attempted to be justified, now underpin the present research, which applies them to the analysis of culture, society, and politics in an attempt to shed light, to the best of our ability, on the plight of the Western world.

We hope that, in doing so, we have been able to clarify more intensely that human beings, as erratic beings, are not adrift. This understanding is monocular. They are, in fact, adrift because they lack orientation in a stationary society that is dominant today and subject to the administration of emptiness, of the desert that runs through it. Now, this pejorative sense of the expression referred to human beings in the Western present. In another sense, when studied in itself and not in its present concreteness, being erratic means being-in-transition. And this human condition does not imply its disorientation or its arbitrary becoming as constitutive elements. The erratic being, on the contrary, is self-creating with criteria and normativity, but in such a way that its direction is not dependent on an identity foundation, but, paradoxically, on an absence of foundation that self-organizes chaotically. The author believes that the first part of this research justifies erraticity—not only of human beings, but of reality as such and in all its generality—in the latter sense, which is not pejorative but noble and elevated. The second part would account for processes in our culture that hijack this erratic, creative, and judicious dynamism, causing it to fade into erraticity in the first of the aforementioned senses and, more precisely, as the wandering of a world that devours itself in its own course of action.

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