



Title, The Return of the Utopias

Author, Jorge Orta

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The aesthetics of ethics
a draft manifesto for the third millennium.
I will never despair.

On my knees, I beg everybody to do what they can.
That everybody, confronted with their conscience
and faced with the massacre of the children
who die of cholera or exhaustion,
needs to ask themselves what they can and should do.
Sister Emmanuelle

Are the ideals of youth ephemeral; the force of will that desires to change everything; that innate nonconformism which usually characterizes the individual who is beginning to discover the world, society and its rules?

Does the clash with a system established by adults, often in dis-accord with the pure and naive view of the adolescent who believes he has the strength with which to change society's blind course, belong only to the young?

Do the ideals of youth inevitably form part of an individual's initial awakening, slowly dissolving over the course of time as he adjusts and adapts to the pre-established system?

Is the mind's initial vitality relative to the progressive loss of physical strength? Is the conformist adaptation directly proportional to age?

It did not appear to be like that, at least for certain people who silently or forcefully shaped my youth. Those like Martin Luther King, Helder Cámara, Gandhi, Mother Teresa and many others whom, by total sacrifice of their lives, opened the way to hope.

The time for Utopias appears to be over. With the explosion of communism, our era appears to cling more than ever to an intense materialism, in which a rampant super-capitalism has imposed an inhumane model for the end of the century.

More than ever extreme poverty spreads conditioned by the wealth of a very few.

The survival of the fittest is offered as the ideal for our youth; a kind of "Noah's Ark" for those who are fortunate enough to come aboard.

In this leap in the dark, what is left for the other two-thirds of humanity (hereinafter known as “dust”), other than the cataclysm of a flood that will bury them in the ground before their time is out.

Varying degrees of despair appear to invade all of mankind. For some, our disorientated youth seem to look for understanding and future; for others, their complaints seem to become useless to the point of passive acceptance, or for the most fragile on the route to endless exile, an extreme resignation to the point of abandonment (as broadcasted via satellite networks).

Individuals and the masses appear to accept a social system which generates misery and marginalisation.

There are no longer any important projects, and the international humanitarian organizations vacillate between being discredited or powerless in the realm of action.

The despair, conformity, helplessness, abandonment of the fight, self-underestimation, the lack of risk, the acceptance of a system which has lost its sense of direction, all nourish the kingdom of “AntiUtopias”.

But beware, it is not in the least my intention to present a view of an apocalyptic end of the century, invaded by nihilism, dominated by pessimism and without hope for betterment. On the contrary, to outline the diagnosis is to understand the present in order to imagine the future.

To prompt the return of the Utopias is to search for the keys which will open the doors to the third millennium for all of us, allowing us to see farther and to facilitate a reconciliation. A society cannot renew itself, much less exist, without Utopia. Utopia is the movement. It is the will to go farther, to invent another world, so that ours may be revitalised.

To build Utopias is to search for the evolution of change, to imagine the change and undertake the change. Utopia is radical, it is a return to basic principles, it is to re-form, to re-make, to re-activate, to replace, and to re-integrate...

Utopias are like clouds which allow new ideas to fall like rain, followed by the nitrate needed to make them flourish.

The Third Millennium is a challenge for men of imagination, who invent and who take risks with a sense of immensity and the perfection of humanity.

Thus, like Plato’s ideal city, we are presented with a model of “Republican Justice”. The imaginary new world should lead us to the transformation of the present world and forge the way from the “Perfect City” to the notion of a perfected world for all mankind.

Utopia leads us to reform permanently the laws of a system incapable of, or not interested in a precise understanding of what is the best and the most just for each individual, and so to adapt these laws progressively to the diversity of behavior and to the spirituality of mind.

To make this step materialize, the Artist-Utopus is needed in order to merge productive Utopias. The “Spiritus Phantasticus” is required more than ever. Only the creative imagination can give the mind the necessary insight with which to design a model and put it into practice.

Art is not an imitation of reality; it surpasses reality in its perfectionable aspects.

Feelings of harmony, of well-being (bien-être) refer to a state of the soul in accordance with the forces of nature. Modern man tends to move away from that design.

The daily pace of work, the stress, the struggle and the competitiveness characteristic of urban centres, the saturation of information, of publicity, of consumption, of noise, of interference and the overall number of obligations, plunge us more deeply into an artificial world.

The loss of the natural environment often entails the loss of certain spiritual values: the reference to our primary essence, to the origin of creation, to our own origin and destiny.

Art in the natural environment is an experience that embraces nature, the cosmos, and a journey into the interior of the spiritual being, a tapping into the soul's energy sources.

In order to gain harmony, it is essential to rely on Utopia.

It enables us to imagine the ideal world out of the one of rebelliousness and criticism.

Utopias push us toward transcendence, toward the search for truth, destroying all those clichés that block our phantasticus.

Utopia is the untiring search for perfection, as inspired by an ideal world and an absolutely perfect Being, in order to return to the conversion of our earthly Being.

Utopia, which implicitly carries the notion of the infinite and perfection, leads to victory over dust, and over death.

The revelation that Lucio Fontana passed his earlier years in the house of my grandparents allowed me to progressively understand, the "space" that he had left open in art.

Going beyond the limits of the pictorial surface, he penetrates the canvas by ripping it, perforating it, torturing it to the point of laceration. Is an irreversible and radical gesture.

And it is precisely into that laceration, that open sore, that deep wound with no visible end, that I wish to intrude.

Network of Dust is a trip into Fontana's gaping wound, which takes us to that other space inhabited by the dust, which goes beyond the "Aesthetic Space" and leads us to a moral space, raising questions about the role of art in the modern context.

A wound for our world, which goes beyond aesthetics and situates itself before ethics.

Today's art currently finds itself in a moment of transition which demands a break from the aestheticism of recent "DOLLART" decades.

A profound change is necessary in essence and in form, in the media and in the objectives. An art needs to be re-united after the accelerated transformations that are hastening the end of this century.

Art which in principle is active from the fore front, has been forced to yield to events from the rear guard.

Luckily the current market crisis exposes the "dollart aesthetics" and accelerates the possibility of a new art form.

An extraordinary challenge, everything is to be re-done, re-invented at the dawning of the third millennium.

"Aesthetics becomes a product resulting from any human activity". Thus, suggests the intermittent signal from the "Beuys lighthouse". His doctrine on spiritual evolution, is the doctrine that includes the ethics of social

sculpture. Alchemist by nature, all transformation is possible, and all transformation is desirable. His disappearance takes away one of the last energetic utopias but leaves us an open road.

The aesthetics of action knows no miraculous solution.

It is a type of aesthetics which confronts the mythicizing of new technologies, often interpreted as an end in itself. There is a great temptation to believe that they are redeeming by means of an imaginary disconnection from the human element.

Is it still possible to believe that the electronic revolution may, on its own, heal Fontana's cut and reconstruct the social splitting and the global dismemberment?

The tecno-world confronts the artisan-world without realizing that this interaction will enable us to recover the organic human condition.

It is thanks to the interaction of these apparent extremes that the social-individual will be reunited with his era.

As suggested by Torres García, it is essential to move the South, thus inverting the North of certain populations.

Network of Dust evokes the cycles of misery in the modern world, of Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, of Somalia and Chechnya of nationalist or religious conflicts, of genocide owing to a lack of assistance..., to summarise, the two-thirds of humanity that will begin the third millennium totally excluded.

One great enemy, a subtle and very a dangerous one, is gaining ground; that of indifference, a weapon of terrible devastation that silently annihilates and sends out shock waves of global proportions.

"That's not my problem" we repeat incessantly, while we cling to the trappings of privileges, dictating or supporting the laws of an inadequate world.

A world which we reduce to our near surroundings, in conscious ignorance of a global reality. A world locked within the individual confronted with an unprecedented communications network.

Network of Dust is concerned with the underlying forces which counteract the chaos and confronts all pessimism. In particular, tolerance and love, two weapons of seemingly "archaic technology", that are amazingly efficient, capable of reconstructing a third millennium from interior peace. These are the only forces really suitable for confronting the worst of the enemies which dwell within.

Tolerance and love; two ancestral Utopias which human selfishness strives to keep from blossoming.

Where the alchemist artist is concerned, the challenge consists of transforming the dust into gold and the ashes into life.

Utopia is energy which defends the most fragile.

The real Utopia is actually ethics.

The aesthetics of ethics is actually nothing more than giving moral meaning to an artist's work, when the circumstances summon us to defend a route which could lead us toward a new poetic life.

For a renewed Utopic art form.

Jorge ORTA Nov. 1994.