

What is astonishing is that it is in the field of aesthetics, long night in which all cats are grey, that the famous excellence of the people in general is spouted. Let us be consistent. Why is the physics of the people not excellent? Why is its biology not most excellent? Why is its historical overview not exceedingly lucid? And of course nobody takes their consistency to the point of declaring that the famous "people in general" is more excellent than Einstein, Claudel Bernard or Marx, but if we move to the realm of art... The more primitive, more feet-on-the-ground, more instinctive, the better. It's a whole criticism making use of these words, as aesthetic concepts, a whole criticism-symbol of a resigned culture¹.

ART AND UTOPIA

Ever since Thomas More, the notion of utopia has activated surprising imaginaries and idealized descriptions. A recurring theme within several fields, particularly those of philosophy and political and social theory, utopia, whose programs know no ideological boundaries, projects visions of new worlds, of a future beforehand.

As we know, art's territory has not escaped utopia's purifying temptation. We would even say that it has projected it as *The best of worlds*, where the *Beauty* and *Goodness* pair assumed itself as an aesthetic-moral warranty certificate. The History of Art, of Aesthetics and of Criticism offer us multiple sophisticated examples of utopian aspirations and promethean mystifications about art and the artist.

Thinking art and utopia. We are certain that art does not belong to the domain of utopia if, with it we want to make present approximations of future times, ideal spaces with no real place, normative and totalizing.

As Deleuze has proposed, "utopia is not a good concept: there is instead a "fabulation" common to the people and to art. The bergsonian notion of fabulation should be resumed and given a political sense"².

About utopia's sense for life and art we may say it is expressed in one movement, at times unhappy, at times persistent. As nothing seems to oppress

1. Eduardo LOURENÇO – *Heterodoxia I*. Lisboa: Editora Gradiva, 2005, p. 31.

2. Gilles Deleuze - *Conversações*. Lisboa: Editora Fim de Século, 2003, p. 233. The author also stresses that the people is "always a creative minority, and remains one even when it acquires a majority: because they are not lived in the same plane.(...) The artist cannot fail to appeal to a people, he needs it in the depths of his action, it is not his role to create it and he cannot do it. Art is what resists: it resists death, servitude, infamy, shame. But the people cannot concern itself with art."

us more than the sense of incapacity, the utopian impulse assures us the surmounting of despair.

ART AND HETEROTOPIA

Thinking art and heterotopia. We shall convoke art as a space of heterotopias.

In the text *Des espaces autres*, Michel Foucault identifies several differentiated heterotopic spaces, such as, for example, the graveyard, the museum, the library, the theatre, the garden, or the fair.

Heterotopic spaces represent real, effective spaces, out of all places but locatable, acquiring different forms without necessarily possessing a universal character. They have, within society, specific workings and the power to, in a single real place, associate several spaces, incompatible within themselves. Theirs is the singular function of resistance, deviation, evasion, that transforms in accordance with the historical moment and the culture framework.

It is that point in time when men are experiencing a state of rupture with their traditional time that heterotopia clearly works, says the author. Thus one understands the connection made between heterotopias and heterochronias, as well as the complex mutual organizations.

Assuming a system which isolates them and simultaneously allows their opening, heterotopias also contain a function that unfolds itself. On the one hand, producing an idealized space, they denounce real space as even more elusive, on the other, they create a real space desirably as perfect and regulated as ours is unorganized.

However, to the author, it is the ship that offers itself as a heterotopia par excellence: “the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that lives by itself, that is closed on itself and that it is left, at the same time, to the infinite sea (...). It is understandable why the boat was for our civilization, from the sixteenth century to the present day, (...) the largest reserve of imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats dreams dry up, espionage replaces adventure, and the police the corsairs”³.

ART AND DYSTOPIA

The Vatican is present in this calendar year of 2013, at the Venice Biennale. Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, who is a kind of minister of culture for the Vatican, had for long been developing efforts in that direction. It is known that the president of the Biennale, Paolo Baratta, was also interested in such participation, now a reality.

3. Michel FOUCAULT - “Des espaces autres” in *Dits et écrits IV (1980-88)*. Paris: Gallimard, 1994, p. 762.

In an interview published in the magazine "Art Press", Massimiliano Gioni, artistic director of this 55th Biennale explains the title chosen for this year's edition, *Il Palazzo Enciclopedico*. In the 1950s, the autodidact Marino Auriti envisioned a 700 meters high museum that would contain all the knowledge in the world. The artistic director welcomes the utopian dimension of this ideal, proposing an exhibition that awakens "the desire to know everything, understand everything, and explain everything and, above all, the impossibility of knowing everything"⁴.

Noting having not felt compelled to represent either all geographic areas or all cultures and furthermore, given the Biennale included the participation of various artists working outside the so-called art system, Gioni says he expects that "the presence of outsiders, given the lack of a better term, contributes to boost the *insiders* to get out of their comfort zone. Not that I want to be a sort of anti-market champion – there are many established and recognized artists in this exhibition – as I sought objects that can not only be bought, but that are worth above all for their talismanic powers or affective, psychological or socio-anthropological values, rather than economical ones, with which they were invested"⁵.

Among many other things, the artistic director also claims a faith in the transformation power "of our internal, private, oneiric images that (...) help us form a new ecology of images, in which we won't content ourselves by accepting those that surround us and that we force ourselves to ingurgitate every day, but we will make an effort to cultivate images endowed with a certain intensity and – I dare say it - a certain purity"⁶.

Countries such as Angola, Bahamas, Bahrain, Kosovo, Maldives, Ivory Coast, Kuwait, among others, were represented. The Biennale seems to oscillate between a remake of *When Attitudes Become Form*, the celebrated 1969 Harald Szeemann's exhibition, and the shadow, here rendered pastiche, of the exhibition *Les Magiciens de la Terre*, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin in 1989. Esoteric, autodidactic, mystical, official, institutional languages reinforce the Encyclopaedic Palace, in a kind of aspiration for an *Epistemologia Mundi*, converted to the original purity.

Throughout the interview, not a single reference to the presence of the Holy See, as if it was something usual, or as if the History between artistic production and the Church was free from blemish.

We know that Vatican's motivation for contemporary art is now reinforced, thus seeking to re-establish the connection, apparently interrupted in the last century, between art and faith. We excuse ourselves from explaining the multiple moral and political reactions of the Church to the works of several artists. We remember, in a more or less recent past, the Church's aesthetical censorship to the artwork of Pipilloti Rist at the 2005 Venice Biennale. The public had half the time to see the installation *Homo Sapiens Sapiens*, because the Church closed San Stae.

4. Robert STORR; Massimiliano GIONI - "Massimiliano Gioni. Il palazzo enciclopedico" (interview), in *Art Press*, n° 401, supplément , 55a Biennale de Venise, Juin 2013, p. 6.

5. Robert STORR; Massimiliano GIONI - "Massimiliano Gioni. Il palazzo enciclopedico" (interview) ... p. 9.

6. Robert STORR; Massimiliano GIONI - "Massimiliano Gioni. Il palazzo enciclopedico" (interview) ... p.10.

But what we also know is that David López Ribes⁷ won, in 2012, the Painting Prize awarded by the Pontifical Academies, and at the time of its delivery, he would have mentioned that in the whole of his work he could not highlight a master piece, as all his works were his family. He would also have said that beauty is Christ. This artist collaborates with Kiko Arguello, founder of the Neocatechumenal Way, in art projects designed for liturgical spaces.

Returning to the role, not of great commissioner, but, contemporaneously, of great curator, the Holy See has Genesis as the theme of its pavilion and a Cardinal as a curator. The group Studio Azurro, Josef Koudelka and Lawrence Carroll were elected to present their respective artistic hermeneutics.

According to Vatican radio news, the President of the Biennale sees the Holy See's presence as a fundamental opportunity for the territory of contemporary art: "The arrival of the Holy See, in this phase, may be very important, precisely because it can contribute in a particular way to that special attention, to that selective attention that is more than ever necessary when facing this positive diffusion of contemporary art"⁸.

We do not know what might be the important phase Paolo Baratta seeks to evoke. The domain of the un-said, with greater or lesser cynicism, points to that of *false conscience*: "In capitalism only one thing is universal: the market. There is no universal State precisely because there is a universal market of which States are nuclei, are Stock Exchanges. The market is not universalizing, homogenizing. It is a fantastical process of richness and misery fabrication. (...) There is no democratic state that isn't deeply compromised with that process of human misery fabrication"⁹.

Cardinal Ravasi, committed to the approach between faith and contemporary art, and not fearing that confrontation, would have lamented (during the meetings on *Liturgy, Art and Architecture in the 50 years of the Vatican II Concilium*, taking place at the Catholic University, in Lisbon), that "much of secularized contemporary art, bears no beauty or message, and also criticized some churches built in recent years. (...) Cardinal Ravasi recalled that without knowing the Bible it is difficult to understand most of the works found in museums, ensuring that the Church is increasingly engaging in dialogue with artists, to bring faith and art together"¹⁰.

In Portugal, the Catholic University, through its Vice-Rector, Isabel Capeloa Gil, seems to corroborate Ravasi's view: "Contemporary art is frequently enigmatic, renegotiating, often, the relationship between the beautiful and the ugly, but nonetheless constitutes a search, even if located, for the revelation of a certain transcendence.(...) Instead of a liturgical functionalization of art, the works of Czech photographer Josef Koudelka, of the American painter Lawrence Carroll and of multimedia collective Studio Azzurro, configure the circle of creation, presenting contemporary art in dialogue with the oldest aesthetic manifesto, the Book of Genesis and its most

7. The artist's work can be consulted on the official website <http://www.davidlopezribes.com>.

8. JE (Vatican Radio) - "Bienal de Veneza: apresentada participação da Santa Sé", in http://pt.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/05/14/bienal_de_veneza_apresentada_participacao_da_santa_se/br-692104 (accessed on 11.06. 2013, 11h28 m).

9. Gilles DELEUZE – *Conversações*. Lisboa: Editora Fim de Século, 2003, p. 231.

10. Ângela ROQUE – "Cardeal Ravasi anuncia pavilhão do Vaticano na Bienal". Available in http://rr.sapo.pt/informacao_detalhe.aspx?fid=30&did=85392, 15.11.2012, (accessed on 20.06.2013, 17h35m).

perfect representation, humanity. A radiant encounter to visit until November 24”¹¹.

Much of contemporary art bears no beauty or message? Genesis as the oldest manifest (?) of aesthetics? We know that the Beautiful is a well-founded illusion, as Durkeim said about religion. If the traditional Aesthetics, throughout its History, found in Philosophy the instance of judgment and validation of artistic production, the twentieth century affirms – in a clearly dominant way when compared to previous periods - the impossibility of substantive criteria of the Beautiful.

In any case, The Genesis does not figure in the History of Aesthetics, even when, *in illo tempore*, it wanted to see itself as a religion of art, looking to take its explanations as the "good" explanation or the "good" reason.

It has been long time since, in the art world, the temptation of artistic taxonomies has been relinquished, and gone are the times of art as moral harmony or metaphysical splendour.

Does cardinal Ravasi find *beauty* and *message* only in works of a religious nature? Is it just in this dimension that the Holy See recognizes contemporary art? Art, as a heterotopia of resistance, distances itself from the encyclopaedic rhetoric prisoner of the aesthetic paradigm of harmony. It always presupposes a real place, a place of incompatibilities and heterogeneities, a place of adventure.

It is, in the manner of Foucault, a *dehors*, a privileged exterior place in a state of crisis.

It would be necessary to open another chapter to talk about the most secret bank in the world: a dystopian place where the relationship between art and faith is *renegotiated*. No fairy tale, no City of God, no City of the Sun.

Michel Foucault in the text *Eurydice and the Sirens*, questions if their seduction would not reside “in the void they open, in the fascinating immobility they provoke in those who listen to them?”¹² To stay alive is to become restless with the singing of the sirens and cross the abyss of the sea.

It seems that to the Venice Biennale no ship arrived, just a ferryboat organized as an enterprise. There is no navigation on the high seas, which is to say on the seabed. There is no crossing but an accumulation of surplus value.

Corsairs fled, and usurers remained.

11. Isabel Capeloa GIL – "Bienal de Veneza: encontro radioso entre Bíblia e arte contemporânea promovido pela Santa Sé". Available in Secretariado nacional da pastoral da cultura, http://www.snpcultura.org/bienal_veneza_encontro_radioso_entre_biblia_e_arte_contemporanea.html (accessed on 21.06.2013, 15h 18m).

12. Michel FOUCAULT – *O Pensamento do Exterior*. São Paulo: Editora Princípio, 1990, p. 57.