

Thoughts on 'Utopia' **(in relation to Beautiful formula and the Rhythm section)**

The concept of Utopia... as the ideal and happy state of a society which fulfils all its member's desires and aspirations cannot be looked at through the lens of history but with a profound scepticism, if not a deep sense of sadness and irony.

Every historical attempt at Utopia has inevitably generated some form of imposition, subjugation, exclusion, slavery or annihilation of other people/s who are not included in the dominant group's agreed Utopian vision.

From an economic perspective, irrespective of the political regime, to a greater or lesser degree, one person or group's security, wealth and contentment is dependent to lesser or greater degree on the control, if not enslavement, of another group.

Collectively human beings are emotionally and intellectually addicted to a binary view; to a moral stance of valuing one individual, tribe, group, race, more than another. By virtue of our persistent sense of hierarchy and loyalty to our individual group, we value one individual or group as being more deserving or worthy than another, either on the basis of ability, gender, sexuality, age, class, wealth, race, religious or political belief etc.

The binary equation: If what I am is good, logically that which is not like us, that which is 'other' must inherently be bad or lesser.

Every idealised constructed model of societal and political structure, whether, tribal, feudal, monarchist, capitalist, consumer, socialist, communist, theocracy, oligarchy, libertarian or anarchist suffers one blindingly obvious and inevitable flaw.....that given the diversity of human personality, maturity and cultural taste, (and from even a cursory observation of family relations, which point to universal human condition) it can clearly be observed that one individual or one group's idea of Utopia/heaven will be another individual or groups definition of purgatory or hell!

A simple observation of differing temperaments, personalities and tastes points to the inevitable tendency of individuals to sub divide and align into sub groups of shared interests that inevitably fall into competition and conflict with other contrasting groups, generating entropy to dystopia, to a state of conflict and war.

The most prevalent pattern is that those with power, whether taken or given by consensus, impose the structure which privileges their group's idea of Utopia. This may provide a minority or even a majority temporarily with a state of being close to Utopia but never inclusively for all of society.

At a simplistic level there are two prevalent societal organisational models:

one is an agreement to live by a common belief, a dominant ideology, to work towards maintaining that dominance; converting, excluding or punishing those who don't conform

or

alternatively to agree to tolerate difference and to preserve the rights of those who are different. This requires a tolerance for complexity and an ability to empathetically relate across dividing interests.

History has taught us that the most we can aspire to is to achieve a balance between personal liberty and social responsibility, that society is not a fixed but a fluid entity which is in a constant state of tension between social mobility, individual freedom and constraining laws which protect the common good. Good governance is responsive and flexible to the shifting and evolving needs and effectively maintains the equilibrium between individual freedom and collective responsibility.

Utopia in relation to Identity:

Our individual concept of Utopia is at core an issue of individual and cultural value system/s, and depends deeply on the maturity and definition of the 'self and collective identity'.

The undeveloped immature 'small self-identity' sees itself as the centre, wanting the world to revolve around it's needs and inevitable leads to conflict with similar undeveloped individuals competing; only cooperating in the short term to a mutual gain. This 'small self' is essentially egotistical, self-interested, insular, culturally immature,

undeveloped and defensive. This relationship is also enacted collectively in relation to other groups and nations.

The more culturally informed and mature 'larger self' does not see itself as the centre but as part of a relational complexity, rationally and empathetically navigating this complexity, seeking to comprehend, relate and connect. Rather than simply competing, this more developed sense of individual and collective self seeks connection, dialogue and relationship. This requires a responsive ability to adapt to new evolving situations and relationships without regressing into defensive self interest.

Utopia in relation to globalisation:

We are living in an age of globalisation, where commodities, commerce, cultural products/ideas are exchanged and move freely through the global economy in an increasingly complex flow. This flow effectively transgresses and does not operate within or recognise older models of national boundary. The evident prevailing commercial and cultural interconnectedness, interdependency is now at odds with a more retrogressive mental idea of wishing to return to a simpler model of a contained system of national identity and clear physical boundary, to a regressive protectionism. The issues of migration of people is a driving the unresolved agenda in European politics and articulates the tension between an empathetic sense of responsibility on a global level at odds with an increasing desire to regress to a protectionist, unified local racial and national identity.

The relation between Art and Utopia:

The arts performatively enact our philosophical relation to ideals, to our aspiration for a Utopian vision. Our taste in the arts reflect our values, our emotional and intellectual understanding and relation to life.

A more conservative view of art takes pleasure in the highly orchestrated stylistically predictable, which does not threaten change or challenge an audience to alter its viewpoint. It offers reassurance of a prevailing stability and order in the repetition of the familiar while providing novelty of experience, but instinctively resists change at any deeper level.

In contrast more relevant contemporary art forms ask the viewer to reconsider and change aesthetic and social habits, effectively challenging the viewer to engage in a new experience and realign their view to another perspective on the familiar. In this sense the dynamic function of art is to facilitate a shift in understanding or perspective which allows the viewer to assimilate whatever is evolving in the flow of political and aesthetic development. It effectively aids society to assimilate change.

In this sense Art = transformation.

Utopia in relation to manifestos:

Previous Utopian models in art have been formed out of small groups of collectives, collaborating round a manifesto, working towards a Utopian idea of the idealised and perfect art form. The inherent dilemma of the 'manifesto' is that it initially generates a momentum and developmental forward movement but inexorably becomes an encumbrance on its members and fades into irrelevance as technologies, communication systems, aesthetic and social needs evolve.

From a contemporary arts perspective, the advancement of contemporary practice can be defined as an exploration and expanding tolerance, in effect a celebration of relational complexity. Never before have the arts incorporated such an eclectic, pluralistic polyphony of visions and ways of being, made up of inter-related multiple view-points, philosophies and perspectives.

Contemporary practice is in a continuous dynamic process of assimilating the unfolding relational complexity and it is the very enactment of this process which makes art most valuable to a society. In this sense the 'relational' nature of art work is the very enactment of the necessary tolerance and skills to navigate the relational complexity of art and life itself.

I would posit that this tolerance for subtleties and nuance of relational complexity and ability to relate and cooperate with the 'other' in this relational complexity is as near as we are capable of reaching a possible state of cultural utopia.

The evolutionary challenge in the arts can be illustrated through the difference between a classical performance operating to a fixed score with predictable outcome and the more flexible and unpredictable score exemplified in Jazz.

In Jazz the Utopian ideal of free autonomous individuals working in a responsive state of collaboration is expressed through the agreement and connection between the performers to improvise but sustain a relational unity. This performative relation is the expression of a societal Utopian ideal of free individuals collaborating in an evolving flow of inter-related complexity.

The relationship between Utopia and the 'Beautiful formula'

The beautiful formula is what artists effectively seek to achieve in the development of their practice; a process, methodology or system which not only produces aesthetic beauty but at a deeper level can articulate the complexity and counterbalance of forces in a state of free flow and dynamic equilibrium.

The unique attribute of 'the Beautiful formula' is that it has devised a formula which provides a score which propels the participants into an intense level of performative collaboration, resulting in works which both have an intense sense of coherent inter-related structure but equally a sense of unpredictable and innovative outcome.

The relationship between Utopia and the 'Rhythm section'

It is in the orchestration of difference, in the interrelated tensions and rhythmic patterns that music connects and stimulates intellectual and aesthetic pleasure. Similarly the same principle applies to visual rhythm, and is embodied in the aspirations of the Rhythm section collaborations: through the willing collaboration and exchange between different individual rhythmic structures (held within the diverse creative practices of the Rhythm section collective) there is similarly an enactment of the Utopian ideal of individual creativity working within a relational complexity of exchange and connection.

It can be summarised by the mathematical principle of $1+1=3$the exchange and relation between 2 sets of rhythms produces a third energy and form which is the product of the exchange between these two differing rhythmic structures.

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