

## The Art of Orientation

by Carsten Juhl

In this small text I shall deal with some tasks that can be ascribed to the art work produced by Carlos Andrade and Todd Ayoung in recent years.

The works of "What is Left Over" shown in Copenhagen in October 2000 stimulated the sensibility and general awareness of transformations, especially rough ones like potential home-terrorism and postcatastrophic documentation. "The Travel Poster series", 2002, "The Economist" and "Tock Tock, 2002- 2003 at the

"Risk" exhibition at MUSEO DE ARTE MODERNO LA TERTULIA DE CALI in Cali,

Colombia is less

fictional and more conceptual, and that is of course consistent with the rise of bellicose politics after September Eleven.

The work of Ayoung and Andrade shown in Cali has a dynamic point of view: It is concerned by the lack of knowledge and ethical nobility in the way, the American system of communication and government is treating the world as a whole.

Indeed, a more refined and precise orientation is needed and so is some sort of cosmopolitan finality: We are entering into a phase of modern history like the one from 1914 until 1921 or the one from 1937 until 1947. Those were years of important potentialities. In the first case, economic and cultural crisis had caused growing armament and incompatibility among the empires. War, revolution and counter-revolution were juxtaposed or followed one another. And since that period, art, philosophy and political organization have been radically separated from each other.

In the second case, an ethical perspective dominated the anti-nazi movement in Europe and in the US, but was soon recuperated by patriotic ideology. This was a juxtaposed process too. - Some euphoric years, 1945-1947, followed the defeat of fascist racism, but after a while, the Cold War took over and stopped the experimental =E9lan of artists such as Maya Deren, Jackson Pollock or Asger Jorn. - The brutality of nazism had been so overwhelming, the exterminatory goal of ideology so coherently administrated, that anything else had an anodyne dimension. Even anticommunist paranoia did not manage to produce, say, a defeatist criticism during the Korean War or a dissident analysis of liberalism and socialism (a part from what was done by tiny groups like Socialisme ou Barbarie in France or il programma comunista in Italy, and later on by the Situationist International).

Will the next war become more like the First or more like the Second one? Neither nor. Communist revolution has been solidly delegitimized by the state-capitalist totalitarian systems established in Russia and China. And a global Apartheid system has followed the uprisings and independent movements in the ancient colonies. Somehow we know, that local antifascism is not enough, and that is why the Saddamite dictatorship doesn't excite world opinion more than that. In fact, it is a much more rational scandal, that the postcolonial world is a world of segregation between 800 million people living in the wealthy economies and 5.2 billion living in miserable ones.

Thus global democracy and equality is surely the only decent perspective in this situation, but the national democracies of the West have been rather unwilling to transform the Cold War into a struggle for indistinct equality among the inhabitants of the earth.

Can the actual polarization inside the West produce a change in this situation? It is difficult to say.

German and French political culture are both based upon solid republican ground to-day. But both economies are also based upon accumulation of national wealth. It is more than probable that their perspective only goes as far as to an alliance with Islamic capital as has been suggested more than once by the British magazine *The Economist*.

However, even a severe crisis in the world system of power doesn't provoke the creation of a new perspective in any automatic way. And there is always the danger that instead of an evocation of the idea of equality, political reaction takes over and radicalizes the crisis into even more nationalism and racism, as it has happened recently in Austria, Italy and Denmark.

On the other hand, equality is a moral issue determined in a very complicated manner by the problem of freedom. So equality is out of reach in any direct or immediate way by means of esthetics. You cannot feel the need for equality. You can deduce it from the combined lack of wealth and freedom, which dominates the world. This means that reflection and negation has to participate in the theoretical construction and evocation of the idea of equality.

It constitutes a correlative complication, that indignation is such a short and reactive feeling; its maintenance nearly always produces self-righteousness and consequently self-indulgence. And these are forms of thinking that hinder any reflection as Kant has thought us.

That is why visual art becomes so important: it transforms feelings and esthetic perception into a matter of communication by qualifying the very question of what is communicated and how communication is done.

Therefore I think that "Risk" is not only shown in order to transform the public opinion in the West, but also to give a new orientation to the very notion of the western public by displacing the "how".

In fact, since Marcel Duchamp we know that esthetic transformations

realized by means of artistic research and production can create problems for visual understanding. Instead of feeling pleasure or displeasure we can ask ourselves: what are we seeing? And: are we participating the same visual experience?

Litterature:

Immanuel Kant, "What is Orientation in Thinking", in "Political Writings", Hans Reiss ed., Cambridge Univ. Press, 2.edition, 1991.

Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Les TRANSformateurs Duchamp", Galil, Paris, 1977 (English translation available).

Blake Stimson, "Hysterics of the World Unite!", catalogue essay in Carlos Andrade and Todd Ayoung, "What is Left Over", North Gallery, Copenhagen, October 2000.