



farewell, Art
Bureau d'études

Three Axes for Redefining the Arts and their Teaching in a Collapsing Society

The first axis concerns the art of exploring and mapping the landscape of possibilities. Since 1897, when sociologist Emile Durkheim published his seminal study on suicide, it has been known that suicide statistics correlate with our relationship with our future: the fewer the possibilities for harmonious integration in society, the more the aspirations frustrated and social ties broken down, the higher the incidence of suicide.

The art of exploring a reality that does not yet play an important role here, as a way to prefigure the possible in a time of collapse. Art invents the possible where there is nothing left. Art and design are about making objects, ideas, images; about prefiguring beings, creating narratives that delineate realities that have not yet become. Like beauty and love, utopia also belongs to the field of these experiences of a non(yet)-existing reality. Beauty is no more in bodies and things than the image on the mirror is *in* the mirror. This experience of beauty or love is similar to the experience of utopia becoming real.

This potentiality for utopia is to be found in the heart of reality. Identifying it requires a new surrealism, substantially different from the kind of surrealism that is the paradigmatic expression of the capitalist hallucinosis that pervades the world of advertising and information. This renewed surrealism is based on close observation of what surrounds us, of all those beings with which we weave the fabric of social reality together.

Grounded on attentive observation, this surrealism manifests the ability of the artistic act to metamorphose, regenerate, transfigure, and save a fallen and alienated world. This project involves what anthropologist Tim Ingold calls '*unlearning*' and '*unmaking*'. We are called to unlearn what we know: the *clichés* that prevent us from seeing, from observing. Close observation will enable us to not predicate in advance that humans are the (only) beings who think, who are sentient; the only beings with whom we can conduct cultural, economic, and political relationships, share a social life. We will not prejudge which are the beings that together make up our shared world: we leave this question open. Reality will be qualified through experience and observation, carried out with rigour, method, and openness to the unexpected.

This renewed surrealism involves three operations: the first is open and unbiased *observation*. The second is *undestiny*: to disregard what we know (or think we know). The third, *unmaking*, is the preparedness to acknowledge the plurality of modes of existence, to avoid the temptation to fix them into a particular state of being. *Unmaking* activates the capacity to make modes of existence pass from one state to another, to reincarnate them into new kinds of beings.

These operations establish an art that gives rise to a world of teaching immanent in existence: established in/through our engagement with the plurality of beings and their capacity for metamorphosis, mixing, and symbiosis with other beings.

The second axis concerns the art that works towards the making of *a common world after capitalism*. This art is defined as the capacity to work collectively in an open and uncertain world where the nomenclature of beings is not fixed: a world made of multiple – even (seemingly) incompatible – rationalities, ontologies, epistemologies brought together. This art of the common world after capitalism encompasses two main principles (and, perhaps, others, but these are the ones we have identified at the moment):

The first principle is that of moral economy: *less is more*. This principle is one of the mottoes of modern functionalism; it also manifests, in production and social organisation, the principle of self-limitation and autonomy as found in Christian hermit practices, Gandhi's political philosophy, Leopold Kohr's idea of the human scale, the politics of degrowth, André Gorz's proposals for the reduction of working time and the establishment of a universal income. *Less is more* places art and its teaching at the centre of social life: art is the activity that articulates inner life – the development of aesthetic faculties in their personal dimension – with the capacity for self-production and self-organisation within society.

The second principle of this new art and its teaching crosses the triad '*work/place/people*', introduced by geographer Patrick Geddes in his planning of the commons. Here, art and its teaching are positioned in the entanglement of three dimensions that together form a habitable landscape: *place* (with its ecological dimension); *people* (whose composition is not predicated in advance); and *work*, or activity: setting in action, setting in motion. This understanding establishes the theatre in which the agencies, imaginations, visions, observations, and perspectives of different beings, ontologies, rationalities, and epistemologies, interact. By recognising each other, beings recognise themselves and constitute a society: all these beings, human and non-human, living and non-living, together form a people.

These beings act with the means and tools at their disposal, in relationships that manifest cooperation, friendship and love, and, also, predation – exercise of force upon each other, as

they aim to harvest energy for the benefit of themselves and/or their community. *Place* is the disposition of all these forces, of all these interactions sedimented over time; the entanglement of the myriad actions of inhabitation. The school is at the heart of the relationship between place, people, and work, qualifying the territory as '*school-territory*'.

The third principle, that of the *commons*, privileges the art of commoning over the art of appropriation and monopolisation. This principle is immediately relevant to the Scottish context, where land is still monopolised by a small minority of landowners. But the question of the commons goes further. First, it concerns not only the land – its governance, uses, and the way these two are defined within society – but also resources and 'critical infrastructures': the institutions, structures, and facilities that provide the goods and services essential for social life. In the reductive view prevailing in the West, material, moral, and cultural infrastructures are not recognised as critical infrastructures, thus affirming the subordination of culture to economics. The principle of the commons, on the contrary, integrates culture into critical infrastructures, and aims at the common – and not merely public (or private) – management of the latter.

The third axis of our redefinition of art and its teaching in the current state of collapse concerns *time*, that is to say, *memory*: the ways to reactivate memories, to remember, project, and collectively establish what is no longer, and not yet.

A first aspect of this is concerned with the arts of memory, and with the arts of templates and the transmission of skills. These templates and skills are concrete, local, and accepted solutions that can be applied to other problems. Functionally, they act as examples, in the narrower sense of Kuhn's *paradigms*. The power of the template lies not only in the way it facilitates mass production, but also in its own reproducibility: simple geometrical rules are often sufficient for the template to be accurately reproduced as frequently as necessary.

A second aspect stems from the notion of the future as emergence of what does not (yet) exist, and from the art of preparing collectively for a future whose form cannot be determined.

Finally, a third aspect of the axis of time and memory addresses the challenges of the present as the conjunction of multiple temporalities in a complex and entangled space. The archaeology and geology of the present constitute the arts of restoring meaning and presence to what is forgotten, of making the most of the ruins by acknowledging their utopian and critical agency.