

Introduction

In his monumental work *The Principle of Hope*, Ernst Bloch brings forth the idea that man is in possession of an anticipatory consciousness. In order to be human in the fullest sense, there has to be a guiding interior image, especially since “the human being” is still undefined. In effect, no internationally accepted definition exists of what it is, indeed, to be human.

In Plato’s Cave allegory, the chained prisoners are seated in such a way that the fire in the cave allows them to perceive the cave as well as the shadows of people walking by the cave entrance. The prisoners perceive the shadows as real, but the real people “out there” are, for them, imaginary. Hence, the only reality for these prisoners is shadows of images.

Are human beings operating as information-processing systems while being chained in the Platonic cave of their own constraining structure? To the contrary! There is no information in the universe; humans are the *creators* of information; the history of social-cultural evolution testifies to that.

Beneath the surface of these informational complexities, however, the ancient myths live on with undiminished vigor, for the polar tension between hopes and fears (between paradise and perdition) find its most recent expression in a postmodern iconography: superman on our TV screens, is – to quote I.F. Clarke – as explicit as the frescoes in any Egyptian temple.

It is against this background that I am trying now to preview, in a few paragraphs, the gist of the contributions reflecting *Utopia and Technics in the Postmodern Era*.

The vision of Robert Artigiani’s world mirrors his principle of “hopeful realism” that is based on the tradition of North American optimism and a holistic system model. Evolution in this utopian model takes place at symmetry-breaks, resulting in the “creation” of information. Hence, a logical link can be made between increased (social) complexity and individual autonomy. Thus,

humanistic values and social evolution seem to be connected, and science, art, philosophy, and literature may be reconceptualized and redefined as they are produced through a reflexive folding-back on their respective media. Literature, for example, is produced by reflecting on the novel as a medium, while science transforms its map of (our) nature by reading its own technique into reality.

The focus of Klaus Bartels' contribution is the "computer as theater metaphor" that evolved from the frame techniques of the Enlightenment. The aim then was to establish a picturesque social (world) model that today is called "virtual reality." The world of "cyberspace" is such a theater-world of data, through which people are transubstantiated into the high-tech domain of a peep-show box, experiencing data as structures. In one sense virtual reality may extend beyond "reality" by making such abstract entities as mathematical equations tangible and by surmounting problems of scale in manipulating atoms as well as galaxies. In the domain of literary fiction, the narrator becomes a manipulator of computer codes, producing electronically mediated constructs in "cyberspace" that William Gibson defines as a "consensual hallucination."

Quantum physicist Gerhard Grössing's vision of the universe presents a holistic reflection and a bold attempt to bridge the gap between the macroscopic, or classical, realm and the invisible quantum and subquantum states in which the notion of space and time ceases to exist. Is it the scale-bound nature of observer-dependent perception that compels us to differentiate between truth and contingent meaning, depending on whether they refer to the classical or to the quantum and sub-quantum domain? According to the revolutionary paradigm of our era (are not all paradigms revolutionary when they are new?), nonlinear systems – with their nonlocal "functions" – make possible the description of spontaneous organization as well as the corresponding concept of a "fractal evolution" of the universe.

For Alicia Juarrero reality is – by being our creation – context dependent, and we are an integral part of that context which reads: *De te fabula narratur* (There is a story being told about you). Mythic society lived in a participatory universe, and postmodern society has re-discovered in the anthropic principle (Dicke, Wheeler) and the Leibniz logic loop (Gale) that an analysis of the world (physical as well as social) leads back to conscious mind through the act of observation and participation, to partnership in the foundation of

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the universe. By this means, the present and future are once more seen as embedded in myth, "since the science of today becomes the myth of tomorrow."

My contribution traces the history of the *utopian* vision, an anticipatory illumination longing for a world that is an organic whole of which each person forms an inseparable part and in which social justice prevails. Joachim di Fiore, the Calabrian monk (around 1200 C.E.), was the first to proclaim that the self-revelation of God occurs in three stages of historic continuity: the *status* of the Father, followed by that of the Son, and the third and final that of the Spirit, an enlightenment of all in mystical democracy without masters or Church. Joachim's prophecies have, to an astounding degree, permeated literature and influenced political and intellectual movements into our own times. Joachim's "classless society" may now be reformulated in a postmodern version: as a utopian vision of a world that is not a cognitive grasp of a given structure, but a vision that folds back on the hermeneutic interpretation of one's own mental state.

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