

Conversation: Pedro Reyes & Terence Gower

Conversation: Pedro Reyes & Terence Gower for *Bomb Magazine*, New York, December, 2011

Terence Gower's latest video, New Utopias is a lecture filmed in the style of a 1950s Walt Disney documentary. Among the new utopias under analysis are Parliament/Funkadelic's 1974 Mothership Connection tour in which George Clinton proposes to improve the world by bringing us The Funk from outer space; the Rocky Horror Picture Show, in which we observe a society that promotes uninhibited sexual behavior; and the world of Jacques Demy's Les Demoiselles de Rochefort, an aesthetic utopia made up of beautiful artists who are perpetually falling in love. The following conversation took place on October 28th, 2011.

Pedro Reyes: I got so excited when I saw *New Utopias* for the first time because it's not stuck in nostalgia, it's a prognosis, a promise, an invitation to re-imagine the world. I think that the key line in the video is the sentence that ends the piece: "I'm curious to see what new visions of utopia will replace these..." That said, I'd like to ask you how the three utopias you mention in the video, the funk, the meta-sexual, and the cheerful musical utopia tap into different desires in the viewer. I believe that desire is a driving force for change, something Augusto Boal has written about. We cannot change the world without desire. Without desire, you focus on the problem, with desire you focus on the solution. A solution is a desire. You have to desire the change you want to see. And that's the intoxication of utopia.

Terence Gower: I think you got it exactly. The piece is about the *attraction* of the ideal, the desire to move towards it. The three "utopias" I feature in the piece are really all about desire, about pleasure. Desire serves two purposes here, to trigger a desire for progress and change (enacting a utopian response) and to entertain (as a catalyst for the viewer to enter the work), hence music, sex, architecture. I was looking for the most diverse, extreme and unlikely examples of ideal societies to feature in the piece. Partly to be funny (pleasure again), and partly to stretch the boundaries of what utopia could be.

P: At the same time you acknowledge that no one wants to live in someone else's utopia. For example, the modern urbanist's ideal of radiant cities guided by hygienic codes, mainframes and super-structures have proven to be oppressive. The liberation of utopia is when the individual finds his "sweet spot", the place where he or she fulfills his desire and performs at his or her highest

level. This is expressed in the phrase you repeat in the video "Don't dream it, be it", the mantra from the Rocky Horror Picture Show.

T: I like your idea of the sweet spot, because I think the impossibility of utopia has this primal melancholic quality, almost erotic in its nature. You're talking about individualism here: all the examples I use in the piece are from the 1970s and celebrate eccentric individualism, as opposed to the modernist collective utopianism that usually comes to mind.

P: Exactly, what's brilliant about the piece is how it acknowledges these *heteratopias*. The crystal is a recurrent image in utopia (In your piece you mention the glass prism, the pyramid, the geodesic dome.) On one level the crystal symbolizes the molecular synergy of the collective. But the fun begins when a beam of light passes through the crystal and casts a spectrum of diversity. It is there for us to explore, a rainbow of desire.

T: I think we've just written the manifesto for the New Hippy Utopia.