

HUBRIS: LIFE IN FLAGRANTE DELICTO TEXT BY IVO DO CARMO
(BOOKLET) TO THINK AND DESIGN LIFE TOGETHER

In 1994 a conspiratorial essay with a *noir* literature edge was published. David Ronfeldt prepared a study for the CIA's Office for Research and Development, on the Hubris-Nemesis complex. This study *Beware the Hubris-Nemesis Complex, A Concept for Leadership Analysis*, commissioned by the National Security Research Division, is part of what was called 'futurology' during the Cold War, known today as *foresight*. A strategic and multidisciplinary thinking, articulated from the theory of games, futurology mainly aimed to anticipate long-term scenarios in key sectors such as science, economy, society, technology and environment.

With an evident military component and strongly developed to the point of delirium during the Cold War, futurology emerges not as a creative and emancipating desideratum for humanity but as the science of Armageddon. During that period, the elephant in the room was the atomic bomb and the future was envisioned as a terminal point, an historical becoming at the mercy of the anathemas of unfolding political circumstances.

This delightful and prolific field of study served as inspiration for Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* - a dark satire that takes Herman Kahn's theses to debauchery.

Herman Kahn made a name for himself as a noted futurist at the RAND Corporation, an NGO that provides consultancy to the CIA (which also published Ronfeldt's study). Under the motto "thinking the unthinkable" Herman Kahn argued that it is necessary to anticipate the worst. And within that, anticipate the possible, the probable and the preferable, all, of course, within the worst of all possible worlds.

The CIA takes dystopia seriously, and it is in this context that very *sui generis* studies emerge, hybrid dissertations of science fiction and Greek mythology - futurology's raw material - worthy of a Marvel *sci-fi* aesthetic abounding in heroes and arch-enemies.

In Ronfeldt's *Beware the Hubris-Nemesis Complex (etc.)*, we read that 'hubris' is a Greek term that offers several translations and means 'everything that goes beyond measure', a form of excess and violation. Hubris is the expression of an insulting affront to the gods, a very serious offence that triggers the vengeful wrath of the heavens. Hubristic acts are punished by the goddess Nemesis, she who 'gives back what is due'.

The founding myths offer an abundant repertoire of examples of hubris and nemesis in which the hybrid human condition is profiled: Prometheus steals fire from the gods and is eternally tied to a rock serving as food for an eagle; Icarus soars high but melts his wings of wax; Narcissus in love succumbs to his own image; incestuous Oedipus blinds himself so as not to see the world.

In the study about the hubris of 1994, after a brief preamble dedicated to mythology, Ronfeldt presents some historical personalities that he classifies as messianic agents of the Hubris-Nemesis complex, among them Fidel Castro, Saddam Hussein and Muammar Al-Gaddafi. The futurology of this era - from the Cold War to 9/11 - is convinced that the elimination of threats will usher in a period of perpetual peace. This conviction, supported by military power, led Francis Fukuyama (one of the most stimulating intellectuals of the century and adviser to George W. Bush) to announce precociously, at the end of the 1990s, his famous thesis on the end of history and the last man: the entire planet - pacified and playful - would be converted into a global liberal democracy in the hands of exquisite management offices. The world is imagined as an enclosure of prosperity and recreation, freed from messianic agents of the Hubris-Nemesis complex.

But lo and behold, a hubristic foreboding has startled the lives of mortals. The perception and evidence of climate change, global warming, rampant species extinction, deforestation and monocultivation, hyper-production of plastic and waste, water scarcity, all multiplied by the pressure of human expansion on the planet and a global culture founded on the unquestionable right to consumption and endless tourism, founded on transport and oil - are all prerogatives of good Western living, beyond good and evil.

By recalibrating the scale of "thinking the unthinkable" to the challenges of the new millennium, futurology has discovered under its magnifying glass a new old threat: not a any historical personality with a messianic complex, but the human species itself in all its extension. The human animal emerges as a host of hubris, simultaneously threatening and threatened. Humans discover themselves - as a species - as a planetary-scale geophysical force challenging the sea, the land, the rivers, the atmosphere and every living thing on the planet. Billions of years of adaptive evolution result in the recent appearance of the human species, the impact of whose existence and ingenuity results in an unprecedented dystopian vision, systemic disruption on all fronts.

The advent of the atomic bomb and terrorism are epiphenomena, one-off events, of a much larger and more continuous advent - the Anthropocene.

The Doomsday Clock, created in 1947 under the threat of the atomic bomb, has never been far from midnight, the symbolic

hour of collapse. Since 2007 its panel of experts who set the time, began to include disruptions related to climate change in their bulletin.

The planet will not be saved by the eradication of evil titans that proliferate on it. The urgency for the emancipation of humanity comes to us in the form of a generational ultimatum: to act on and for the planet from an unprecedented historical subject, the human species for which there is as yet no narrator. The scale of action and thinking required is disproportionate, intangible by the common individual subject. Thus, in the same proportion as a hyper-subject, a hyper-object appears in relation to it: the climate, the planet or AI, for instance. The scale of action and thinking required is elusive for the common individual.

The challenges that arise are extraordinary and require thinking and designing the world from a brutal novelty. It is no longer a question of preserving man, but of overcoming man - a misunderstood Nietzschean thought so often cited for the worst of reasons, the super-human (*Der Übermensch*).

Military legacy, control, surveillance and paranoia serve strategies of survival and domination, which do not lead to the overcoming of man or to living together in the motherhouse.

Originating from game theory and modern computing, the futurology of the contemporary world is, however, at the antipodes of Enlightenment - the splendour of Modernity. Such exacerbated optimism is satirized in Voltaire's famous novel, *Candide*. Faced with the innumerable evils of the world, the protagonist Pangloss reveals great optimism and joy, insisting that we live in the best of all possible worlds. In between the lines, Voltaire's target is the mathematician Leibniz who, given the problem of evil in the world, conceives of a God who, in his infinite algebra and goodness, has conceived the most favourable possible world of all.. This world, the best of all possible worlds, is far removed from the world orphaned by God - five minutes from its end, according to the Doomsday Clock.

The human ceased to be the privileged spectator of the great theodicy. Human coexistence is expressed today in the form of transgression and usurption. In the dream of Reason there is no longer room for utopia. It is imperative to think and design life together, not only with each other, but also with the forest, with the sea, with the mountain, with the sky, with animals and with stones.

It's all there in Voltaire's satire. Everything bad happens to Candide who listens to Pangloss' arguments justifying that we live in the best of all possible worlds. However, this exercise of goodwill and inverted futurology, based on the idea of a benevolent, omniscient and omnipresent God, does not completely convince Candide. In an oracular tone, with a certain naivety and genius, he rebuts all the arguments of Pangloss with the phrase that will be the epigraph of the doors of the future: "Excellently observed, " answered Candide, but we must cultivate our garden."

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