

3 November 2020

Dear Aldo,

Of course you question yourself, your life, and the value of your work, especially when the moment is at hand when it will be gone from you and you from us, and it must perforce rely upon its own integrity and vision to sustain it in a world that you know to be largely indifferent when it is not overtly cruel. This is the concern of every artist (and every parent, for that matter, perhaps even, in some more animal register, of every human being: what has my life been, after all? Have I merely been playing (or worse, laboring) to no purpose or effect my entire life, this life whose passions, whose storms, whose comforts have seemed so profound or so seductive as to have blinded me to what is truly valuable?) And for you, as an artist, perhaps the questions are even more profound because your entire life has been a dynamic of inspiration and interrogation, or distrust, of the merely inspired. Your work has always been informed by the effort to transubstantiate the given into the sublime, to see beyond ordinary sight, and we invariably revert to the mean, the ordinary, in the wake of our glimpses of the transcendent, from which perspective we know how easily it may appear suspect.

But I know that you are also deeply confident in what you have done, for all that it has remained invisible to so many – to the extent that a Magellan of the galactic can ever be truly confident that he will not simply disappear into the black. It is the nature of profound art to find its audience in the future – Pindar and Heraclitus and Parmenides remain as undigested as Hölderlin, or Roussel, or Leopardi, or Mallarmé, or Blanchot, or Borges – just as you found your subject in the trans-mundanity of space-time. For most of human history our artists have found their subject right before their eyes, or imagined the transcendent from the perspective of the quotidian (as in Christian art), in the celebration, even the exaltation or sublimation, of the ordinary. For most people, this is art, and it is mostly merely ocular (or retinal), as Duchamp liked to deride it. The average is always going to dictate the practice of even the highest of human callings, especially under the constraints of a market world-view, to which we have all been coopted. What cannot be understood by all (or enough among us) cannot become universal, regardless of how universal or illuminating it may actually be. What demands effort, what demands a soul that has made many demands upon itself and never rested, will always remain the province only of other thirsting spirits...until, at least, some technology, or discovery, or genuine cognitive or spiritual advance should suddenly change the common level of understanding, of how we live everyday life...and of course that does and will happen. The future in which you have sojourned these many years will indeed come upon us.

The Warhols and Koonses who have seemed to define the art discourse in recent decades, not to mention the art market, which has spoken a lot louder than art

discourse, are artists of the mundane, of the “slice of cake” or giant stuffed Panda school, as their work was once jocularly disparaged. Of course they got the attention: they brought the validation of art to the everyday things and strivings that defined the constant concerns of the most comfortable populations in the world. And I do not detest them for that; it’s only human. But it is, also, only human. Their ambition, their dedication, their vision stopped at the food in their refrigerators, the objects in their dens, the cars in their driveways, and the money in their banks. It’s definitely not nothing, and it has wide appeal, but it’s definitely not much, either. And such is life for most of us. They are, essentially, society portraitists who have turned their subjects into more generally compelling, more saleable, objects. They are a social phenomenon as opposed to artists driven by vision, by the ineffable need to find some path into the unknown, much though they were not the worst of their kind. They stayed at home and enjoyed gold and spice when Magellan and Vasco de Gama sailed into the teeth of monsters at the end of the earth, the literal end of the earth as some of them imagined.

Your work, on the other hand, has always called us into the future, into the far reaches, which are also the depths, of space and time, the repository of its meaning(s). It demands that we dwell where we are not at home, or at least not comfortable (though they are, very profoundly, the source of everything). When the lineaments of the new human being are drawn, perhaps many years from now, their art will look like quaint nineteenth century landscapes and domestic scenes, while yours will say: they knew already back then where we were going, where we must go, and what we needed there, and they probably didn’t even realize it.

And your work has not been just an analogue or an allegory, or even an imaginative transport to the future, to the deepest and most intimate if still unfathomed reaches of being, but a manifesto and an example, a first step, a leap of faith into a dark that is in the profoundest sense unknown. You have been that primitive of a new era which, though we all are, we resist knowing.

Where this other art is fundamentally defined by limits, and even purports to show us “our place” – to put us in our place – yours defies them, insists on transcendence, struggles against the venality of what they celebrate, embrace, and monetize. If the dark side of Warhol was the melancholy of the ordinary, or of Koons the emptiness of great opulence or “success,” you understand that the dark is what Tesla called “the true face of light.” What they merely depict, you exemplify: the future is already present in your work.

Its fury, its longing, its joy, its struggle, its anger, the frustration of the liminal (of all things that are being born into a world in which they never existed and which is unprepared for them), is a cry for solidarity with nature and a hand extended into its extremes, with which we cannot conjure in our tame and docile imaginations. The pullulating black that you have dared to approach, where being and nothingness are one, this is the true art of our time, even in the most modest sense of telling us where we really are, in which these others, though they think this is

what they are about, have betrayed their calling, or at least fallen very far short of what it demands.

I said this to you before: When I look at your art, I am transported to the outer reaches of the infinite, and then I realize that that is where I am already; to the innermost reaches of the infinitesimal, and then I realize that that is in me, too. There is no more need to speak before it than when I look into the night and travel beyond the visible stars, where you have been, with whose dust you have painted the black from which they have arisen.

You have been privileged to speak with the voice of the universe, the voice of the most expansive and the most intimate, a voice that, though it is always with us, speaking, is rarely heeded, rarely even detected, like those other signals we have been all but hopelessly sending out into the void from lonely mountaintops for so many years now, and therefore it is no surprise that for such a long time so few attended it. This is your glory, not your shame. And, in my view, it should be your exultation, not your despair. You are living in star time, in space time, in time too black for most of us to see you; your time will inevitably become ours.

With profound admiration, gratitude, and love,
John